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ELISHA.

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AUTHOR OF

“ELIJAH THE TISHBITE.”

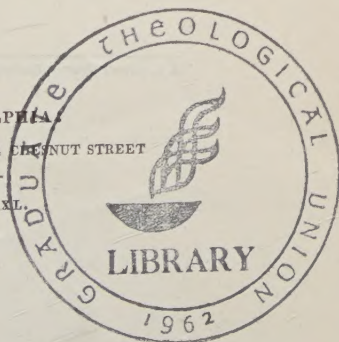
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ELISHA.

I.

ELISHA'S CHARACTER AND FIRST APPEARANCE.

It is a pleasing period of which the prophet Micah speaks, in the fourth verse of his fourth chapter, where he says, "They shall sit every man under his own vine and under his fig-tree, and none shall make them afraid." What a lovely representation of tranquil serenity and delightful repose, smiles upon us in this saying of the prophet! In Micah's time, the happy period he foresaw, lay certainly remote; for it was that which commenced with the incarnation of Deity—the New Testament dispensation. There were, however, seasons under the Old Testament economy in which, for a shorter or longer time, the golden age to come very wondrously reflected itself, and in which, extremely cheering and peaceful prelude of that ardently longed-for era, delightfully presented themselves.

Such a period was the patriarchal age, which succeeded the flood. It exhibited throughout a New Testament character. Its aspect is entirely that of a prophetic representation of the Gospel year of liberty and jubilee. Child-likeness and filial confidence constituted the basis of that position of heart, which the saints of those days occupied with reference to the Almighty. At that time no Sinai smoked, no compulsory law pursued with its menaces

the peculiar people. Love was the ruling motive ; love, enkindled by the condescension and tender mercy of Him, who again rejoiced in the habitable part of the earth ; and in the tents of Abraham, or under the shade of the Terebinthine groves of Mamre, we almost feel as in the cottage at Emmaus, where the man, who is at the same time the Lord Most High, sits confidentially at table with the two travellers ; or as at Bethany, in the house of Lazarus and his highly-favoured sisters.

A period similarly peaceful and benign dawned upon Israel at the appearing of Elisha. It is to these cheering and evangelically enlightened times, that we will at present direct the course of our meditations, and, if it please God, linger awhile in their mild and soothing atmosphere. May the Spirit of the Lord God, the sole interpreter of the Divine records, graciously accompany us, and enable us to meet with many a pearl of consolation, and much refreshing fruit matured under other suns, in this promising course of contemplation !

2 KINGS II. 19—22.

“ And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth, but the water is naught, and the ground barren.

“ And he said, Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And they brought it to him.

“ And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters ; there shall not be from thence any more dearth or barren land.

“ So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha, which he spake.”

We find ourselves therefore again upon that soil so rich in wonders, where a few months ago so many a well of

comfort and encouragement opened itself to us in the eventful life of Elijah the Tishbite. The region upon which we are entering, is consequently not strange to us. It presents a well-known and friendly aspect, and scarcely does our eye rest upon a landscape, a mountain, a valley, or a town, with which some stupendous and beneficial recollection is not connected. Upon this stage, a new history will now develop its manifold images, scenes, and events before us; the history of Elisha, the man of God; a rich and glorious history. May it therefore be to us, what it ought to be to faith, according to the intentions of Him, who caused it to be recorded for us, a source of manifold joy and refreshment in troublous times, and a perennial spring of consolation in the days of trial and affliction.

Our present meditation will be in a great degree a preparatory one, and may serve in the place of an introduction to those that shall follow. We direct our attention, first, to ELISHA'S PECULIAR CHARACTER AND THAT OF HIS VOCATION, and then to THE FIRST PROPHETIC APPEARANCE OF THE MAN OF GOD.

I.

You are already acquainted with the state of things at the period when Elisha began his prophetic career. His labours stand in immediate connexion with those of his great predecessor; and it will be still fresh in your recollection, how affairs stood in Israel at the time when Elijah ascended to heaven. King Ahab had been swept away by the judgment of the Almighty in the battle with the Syrians. Ahaziah, Ahab's son and immediate successor, is likewise no more in the land of the living. Because he sent to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron, as if there

were no God in Israel, the Tishbite was sent to him with the awful message, "Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die." The regal diadem, polluted by a thousand atrocities, then descended from the head of this Ahaziah, upon that of his brother Jehoram, the second son of Ahab and Jezebel; and it was under his reign that Elisha elevated the prophetic standard. The Scripture says of Jehoram, with whom we shall become more closely acquainted in the sequel, that he likewise wrought evil in the sight of the Lord, though not exactly in the same measure and degree as his father and his reprobate mother. Terrified by the horrible judgments which he saw break in upon Ahab and Ahaziah, he had deemed it advisable at least to remove and destroy the abominable Sidonian idol, which his father had caused to be made and set up, as the object of adoration; but in other respects, he continued to adhere to the worship of Jeroboam's calves, patronised the idolatrous priests in every possible manner, and if he occasionally prostrated himself before the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, it was only the hypocritical homage of the moment. His mother Jezebel, the queen dowager, pursued under him her scandalous and reprobate course, and exerted her whole influence over the weak-minded Jehoram, only to strengthen him in his worthlessness, and by his instrumentality to bring the moral corruption of the degraded people to an awful maturity. A filthy idolatry, with which vice in every shape was connected, continued to constitute the religion of the State; the whole land was covered with this darkness, which issued forth from the bottomless pit, and the little Church of God, though beaming with increased splendour from its contrast with this nocturnal obscurity, was only like a verdant oasis in a

vast and howling wilderness, and like a solitary island of the sea, exposed to every storm.

Between the black clouds of this mournful period, the beneficent appearance of the prophet Elisha meets us like a rainbow, announcing salvation. He rose upon his people like a serene and placid moon, beaming only gentleness and peace, after the majestic setting of that glittering and burning meteor, which had shone upon Israel in Elijah. His was not the dazzling and destructive glare of the lightning; it refreshed and gladdened all whom it reached. Many have imagined that they perceived nothing in Elisha, but a weak copy of his infinitely greater predecessor, as they regarded him; and maintain, that the life of the son of Shaphat, as contrasted with that of the Tishbite, was only like a faint echo to the full original sound, or like the more complicated and scientific but far weaker variations of a melody, compared with its simple but infinitely more sublime and majestic theme. But this view of the subject is far from betraying particular acuteness and discernment; and it only requires a little deeper insight into it, to lead us to a very different conclusion. If Elijah was an original phenomenon, Elisha was no less so. There is an infinite variety in all that God creates. The overflowing fulness of his productive power calls forth none but original forms. Who ever thinks of saying, that he who has seen a rose, can no longer be pleased with the bloom of the apple-tree? Does not the latter in its kind, seem equally as admirable and beautiful to us as the former? But if the apple blossom were intended to be an imitation of the rose, there would then be room for comparison, and we might say, it was only an unsuccessful, faint, and inferior copy. But as it is, the one delights us in its peculiarity not less than the other. Keep it there-

fore in view, my friends, that it was by no means the Divine intention to bring, in the person of Elisha, a second Elijah upon the stage ; for if this had been the case, we should be correct in deeming Elisha inferior to Elijah. But Elisha's vocation was essentially different from that of his majestic predecessor, and the whole of the man's intellectual organization, as well as the manner of his entrance upon his office and his mode of acting, most beautifully harmonized with his peculiar calling. What an incorrect and perverted estimate of character would be the result, if a person in judging of Melancthon, were to proceed upon the supposition that Melancthon was called to be another Luther ! In what a false light would the life of an Arndt, a Spener, or a Tersteegen, be placed, were they to be tried by a criterion taken from the spiritual endowments and labours of a Knox, Calvin, or a Zuinglius ! Let each be estimated by the standard of his particular calling ; we shall then not go beyond the truth ; the one will not be found to obscure the other, but like the stars in the heavens, each will retain his individual brightness.

We have hinted on former occasions at that which is peculiar and distinctive in the vocation and character of Elisha. You remember the still small voice on mount Horeb. This gentle whisper pointed typically and prophetically to the appearing of Elisha, and to that new period, which should commence in Israel with and through the labours of the son of Shaphat. Elisha was ordained to appear in Israel as an evangelist, as one whose feet are beautiful upon the mountains ; whilst Elijah had to manifest himself as another Moses, and by his efforts, restore becoming reverence to those laws, which had been trampled under foot. Elisha, as a herald of the Divine loving-kindness, was sent to bind up those hearts, and allure them to

the Lord's paternal arms, which his severe predecessor had broken with the hammer of the law, and had roused by the thunder of his dreadful and mighty deeds, out of the deadly sleep of a long-continued and delusive security.

For this lovely vocation, Elisha had not only been long before divinely appointed, but also imperceptibly trained up and prepared by the Lord. The whole of his spiritual endowments were calculated for this purpose; and not only so, but his outward course of life, from his youth up, and numberless seemingly accidental and trivial circumstances in it, contributed to fit him for his future official station, without his being conscious of it. The harp of his affections had been early tuned to gentle harmony. It was destined to resound to songs of love, and not to thrill with the harsh notes of a flaming zeal. He grew up under circumstances, which were particularly favourable for the development of the more tender feelings of the soul. Surrounded by the calmness and serenity of blooming scenery, and confined within the narrow but social limits of a quiet country life—his mind experienced for many a year together, no other influence, beside that of the blue heaven or the verdant meadow, but such as was exercised upon him by the mild sunshine of a sanctified maternal affection, and the plain unvarnished piety of a father. At the time when the worthy couple rocked their new-born son in their arms, and joyfully said, "He shall be called Elisha"—they had probably no presentiment, that in this name, they had uttered, at the same time, the boy's future calling. For "Elisha," interpreted, means, "God is salvation," or "God is my Saviour;" and the son of Shaphat was destined to magnify him as such by word and deed in Israel; whilst Elijah, whose name signified "God is strength," was ordained to place the judicial severity and dreadful

majesty of the Most High in a more unveiled manner before the eyes of a dissolute people. The whole of Elisha's subsequent history stood in the most beautiful and perfect accordance with this his peculiar vocation. His presence had in it nothing terrific, nothing painfully imposing, nothing oppressive. Every one might venture fearlessly to approach him, and the most timid feel comfortable and at home in his society. That mysterious obscurity did not rest upon Elisha's descent, which so impenetrably veiled the commencement and the early part of the life of his great master. If Elijah entered upon the scene of his labours as one, who without genealogical connexion with the rest of mankind, was sent immediately from heaven upon earth—his successor, though destitute of this halo, so productive of veneration, was surrounded, in its stead, by the more lovely radiance of fraternal affability and openness. His life, from its very beginning, lay unveiled before the eyes of all. The pious and amiable son of the farmer Shaphat, was no mere acquaintance of yesterday. He had often been seen in the field, behind the plough and the harrow, and his family were connected by relationship, or had been long upon friendly terms with others. At the same time there was something in his figure and deportment, which greatly facilitated confidential access to him, and immediately gave the people an idea, that he was an ambassador of an entirely different calling and spirit, to the man from Mount Gilead, with his majestic and repelling appearance. Elisha, as it would seem, had neither the gigantic dimensions, nor, generally speaking, the nervous and kingly figure of his mighty predecessor. His features reflected only mildness and humility, instead of the consciousness of his dignified station; and even his head, deprived of the ornament of manliness, acted as a

symbolical expression of the truth, that the strength of God is mighty in the weak, and aided in interpreting that which was peculiar in his vocation. The Lord who dwells in the high and the holy place, kindly and graciously condescends to the poor and the needy. This was the great and blessed truth which Elisha, in his discourses and actions in Israel, was to place as it were on a lofty candlestick; and this truth found its hieroglyphic in the whole personal appearance of the prophet, from whence it beamed clearly into the eyes of the more thoughtful, even when unaccompanied by his words and actions.

You know, my dear friends, that the great and mighty of the earth are wont to conceal their hearts from their inferiors, and to make, more or less, a secret to them of those feelings of gratitude, love, and friendship, which they may feel towards them; at least, they seldom suffer what we call cordiality to be perceived by those that are subordinate to them; and if ever it is the case, they do not give the feeling its full and perfectly corresponding exhibition. They express themselves more sparingly and coldly than they feel. They economize with the manifestations of their favour as with gold. They hold themselves indebted to their royal dignity to act in this reserved and estranged manner, being apprehensive lest it should be endangered by a too great unreservedness and ingenuousness. But how very indifferent is the procedure of the King of kings! He makes no difficulty of unfolding his inmost heart to sinners. He manifests openly, freely, and clearly, the whole of his tender mercy, paternal kindness, and love towards them; and he does so without infringing upon his majesty and glory; for in this his condescension and confidential intercourse with the little and the lowly, his Divine dignity shines the most illustriously.

II.

We now turn to our history. The narrative which lies before us, makes us acquainted with Elisha's entrance upon his prophetic career. Observe whether what we have just said of the peculiar nature of his vocation, is not fully confirmed by it.

His first act appears as a distinguished symbol of the whole of his labours. He is at Jericho, and commences his sacred vocation in that city, upon which Joshua, in the name of God, had pronounced a curse. He does not begin it with a menace, a judgment, or a malediction; but with an act of benevolence and blessing, in the removal of the curse. How significant! Immediately after the departure of his master, he had fixed his residence in that city. There he intended to await the first commissions of Jehovah in the peaceful circle of the prophets. The pleasing repose he there enjoyed was however of short duration. After the lapse of only a few days, he saw himself called out to the field of public labour. The inhabitants of Jericho had heard what an individual dwelt within their walls, and were of opinion that they ought to avail themselves of such a favourable circumstance. They knew Elisha; they had often seen him at the side of the Tishbite. Many of them had also probably witnessed his wondrous passage through the bed of the river Jordan. It was known to them that he was ordained to be Elijah's successor; and they did not doubt, that the Lord had also endowed him with miraculous powers. They therefore came to him, to lay before him a subject, with which they never would have dared to approach the Tishbite. Sooner would they have expected him to renew the curse of Joshua, than that he would remove it from them and turn it into a blessing. But they expect all that is good from Elisha. Hope smiles

upon them in the affability of this friendly messenger. Fear and timidity depart from his presence, which promises help and deliverance.

Happy would it be, my brethren in the Lord, if we also shone as such benignant stars in the firmament of the earth! This would be the case, if we were resolved to be only vessels of mercy, and dew-drops, in which Jesus reflected himself. There are a few amongst us, unconscious of it themselves, who sparkle as such friendly and lovely constellations. They are those, who, nothing in their own esteem, and emptied of themselves, have renounced their own life, that Christ may become their life; in the enjoyment and believing apprehension of whom, they say with the Psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." Such individuals diffuse around them a delightfully soothing, consoling, and hope-inspiring atmosphere; we become conscious of the firm and sure position which they occupy in the invisible world by faith, and our doubts and fears disperse. We see the profound peace of heart which they enjoy, and feel ourselves breathed upon by a sabbatic influence. The oppressed, embarrassed, and afflicted, involuntarily seek their society, as if, when with these blessed individuals, light, by their means, would again arise upon them, and the wished-for aid approach. They are like friendly satellites, which brightly beam forth the benevolent love of Jesus. The image of him, who invites the weary and heavy laden to him, that he may give them rest, is vitally and vividly reflected in them. He himself appears to greet us in their eyes, benignly to smile upon us through their features, and to speak with us through their conversation. We imagine ourselves breathing the atmosphere of the throne of grace, in their vicinity, and

seldom do we leave them without having obtained a more cheering insight into Divine truth, and a more elevated view of the Divine perfection.

The subject which the inhabitants of Jericho had to bring before the man of God, was the following. The city of Jericho originally possessed a very beautiful situation. An ever-verdant wreath of lofty palm-trees and odoriferous gardens surrounded it, and the circumjacent soil, favourable for every production of the vegetable kingdom, yielded, in fruitfulness, to no other district of the Holy Land. But since the time of Joshua, the beautiful region was no longer what it had been. The curse, above alluded to, had left dreadful traces upon it. The branches of the palm-trees droop; fruitfulness forsakes the gardens, and the shepherds on the meadows, which were once so luxuriant, incessantly complain of the languishing state of their cattle, and especially of the many abortions amongst their flocks; at the same time an universal malady prevailed amongst the people themselves; and untimely deaths were frequent. The cause of all this lay in the quality of the water, which, since the curse of the Lord had taken effect, was no longer wholesome. Whether it flowed, in unfathomable depths, over deleterious strata of earth, or whether the cause of its insalubrity was of a more mysterious and less material nature, it is impossible to ascertain. Be it as it may, the fountains were as though they had been poisoned, and the manifold misery which resulted from it, almost rendered it a cause of regret that Hiel, notwithstanding the Divine warning, should have fallen upon the idea of rebuilding this unhappy and desolated city. What could the inhabitants of Jericho desire more ardently, than the removal of this memento of a fatal event of ancient times from their vicinity, which was

in other respects so beautiful and pleasing ! Much labour, money, and art, had doubtless been already expended for this purpose. But the cancerous evil was not removed ; on the contrary, it only extended itself the more. Elisha is now in the city, and the idea that he might feel inclined to help them, soon presents itself. That which God has inflicted, God only can remove. The mischief was occasioned supernaturally, and a miracle must expel it. With these ideas, and hoping a favourable result, they hasten to the man of God. They find him in one of the dwellings of the sons of the prophets, and encouraged by the kind reception he gives them, they intimate their wishes in a modest manner, by saying, "The situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth ; but the water is naught, and the ground barren."

This description, given by the men of Jericho, reminds me, alas ! of so many a district, even in our native land, of which everything that is pleasing and beautiful may be stated, excepting that "the water is naught ;" I mean in a spiritual sense, and hence the field of the human mind lies waste and unfruitful. Where the spiritual fountains are poisoned, and where, instead of the pure milk of the Gospel, the people are presented, from pulpits and professors' chairs, with the fatal potion of a false and deceitful religion, which makes the individual his own saviour, and leads him past Bethlehem and Calvary—truly this is a curse more direful and horrible than that which formerly devastated the plains of Jericho. Although in such a place, the meadows and gardens may be clothed with all the luxuriance of nature, yet the horrors of an uninhabitable wilderness cover the fields of the heart. If science there weaves its perishable wreaths, and the world presents the poverty of its vain joys—yet in the waste and empty soul

reigns death ; in the inward garden every thing vegetates except the evergreen of hope, the rose of heavenly-mindedness, and the lily of peace. May the Lord create many Elishas, who shall likewise carry to these fountains the healing salt ! This wondrous salt is the doctrine of the cross. Where this is scattered, it transforms the desert of the heart into a blooming and delightful region.

No sooner had the men of Jericho made known their desire to the prophet, than the latter manifests his willingness to comply with their wishes. Elisha perceives in their request, a superior intimation, of which he is the more conscious by the concurring testimony of the Holy Spirit, instructing him what he ought to do. With the confidence of one who is indubitably certain of the success of his undertaking, he says, "Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein." And the men hasten joyfully and full of expectation, to fulfil the commission of the holy seer.

Elisha, in the performance of his miracle, is directed to employ an outward means, and such a one, as could so little produce the intended effect by its natural properties, that the contrary result was the more probable. In a city, which like Jericho lay not far from the Dead Sea, every one knew that salt would only spoil the water and render it unfit for use. The desolate banks of that lake rendered it obvious to every one, that salt water, far from fructifying the soil, only deprived it of its productive power, and inflicted death upon the vegetable world. The recollection of the well-known custom of strewing salt upon those places destined to eternal desolation, rendered the intimation of the prophet extremely strange. But even the contrary nature of the remedy only served to cause the miracle subsequently to appear in a more obvious light. But irrespective of this, it may be inquired, why such an

earthly means was employed? For the same reason, my friends, for which Moses was provided with his wonder-working rod, and for which the imposition of hands was subsequently enjoined upon the apostles. This rod, without which Moses could not effect anything, was intended, with reference to himself, and to the witnesses of his acts, to assist in preserving to him the consciousness of his dependence upon God, and his own instrumental position; and the Lord also attained the same object by the means which he prescribed on this occasion to his servant Elisha. If the prophet had healed the spring simply by waving his hand, or by the mere utterance of his lips, it might easily have seemed as if the miraculous power lay in him, and the sign would have failed of attaining its object. But by the intervention of a means, which seemed indispensable, the matter assumed a totally different appearance. The miracle now manifested itself more conspicuously as the work of the Lord, who was pleased to mingle something of his Divine power, with an element which was of itself inoperative.

Another intention was also included in the Divine appointment of this medium for the miraculous healing of the waters. It was not a mere arbitrary and insignificant circumstance, that the inhabitants of Jericho were commissioned to fetch both the salt and the cruse—this was likewise graciously arranged; nay, it was even intended to contribute to the great and blessed object of Elisha's mission in general. What an honour was conferred on the inhabitants of Jericho, by being permitted to participate in this mighty miracle; what a proof of the Lord's kindness and favour! What condescension of the Almighty was manifested in the circumstance of his selecting a common earthen vessel as the medium of his healing power, and

the vehicle of his omnipotence ! How kindly and confidentially did he approach them by so doing ! Must they not have felt almost as we do, when in the holy sacraments, we see the vessels of our churches become the receptacles of the Divine mysteries, and the vehicles of his gracious assurances ? Would not a blissful presentiment arise in their hearts of those golden days, of which it is written, "In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD ; and the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar !" The whole of Elisha's labours were directed to their becoming acquainted with Jehovah as a merciful Saviour ; and how profoundly and strikingly does even his first act, and the individual circumstances under which it was accomplished, characterize the whole peculiarity of his Divine vocation !

After Elisha had received the new cruse with the salt—it was to be new, that no occasion might be given for the unbelieving or superstitious suspicion that it had contained any secret or magic ingredients—he proceeds, accompanied by these inhabitants of Jericho, to the chief spring of the city and neighbourhood. On arriving at it, he takes the vessel in his right hand, and whilst pouring its contents into the bubbling depth, he audibly exclaims, without any pompous or solemn introduction, "Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters, there shall not be from thence any more dearth or barren land !" Observe how faithfully Elisha watches over the interests of his Lord ! How studiously he takes care that the whole glory shall be given to him, to whom it exclusively belongs, and that not the smallest glimmer of it shall attach itself to his hands, or to any outward means as such. The Lord alone is to be glorified, and the miracle to appear as a pure act of Deity, and as an affectionate salutation from on high. In these

words, Elisha prevents, as it were, any one from touching it with impure hands.

“Thus saith the Lord.” It was therefore with the words of Jehovah that the prophet approached the spring. Certainly such words may well perform wonders. What could hinder me from creating new worlds, were the Lord to put his *FIAT*! into my mouth? His word knows no obstacles, no difficulties. Where it is uttered, that which was not, must hear, and be at his service. What he calls forth, immediately exists! “He speaks, and it is done; he commands, and it stands fast.” Words with such healing power, like those with which Elisha was furnished, are not given to us; but if we belong to his people, we possess much greater and more blessed ones than these. We say, “Thus saith the Lord, No man shall pluck my sheep out of my hands,” and are sure that for the sake of these words, we shall put to shame all the powers of hell. We say, “Thus saith Lord, Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am,” and do not doubt, should even seas and mountains seek to block up our way to heaven, that the former must dry up, and the latter melt away before us like the foam of the ocean. We say, “Thus saith the Lord, Behold the birds of the air! Are ye not much better than they, O ye of little faith?” and have the confidence, that before we shall die of hunger, the clouds would be compelled to rain down bread into our houses. We say, “Thus saith the Lord, All things must work together for good to them that love God;” and know that these words shall deprive even that which is the most baneful and pernicious of its poison, and imbue it on the contrary with salutary and beneficial properties. With such words of God as those above alluded to, we are surrounded as with a barricade; and most as-

suredly they will manifest their potency no less than the words, "I have healed these waters," which Elisha in Jehovah's name, pronounced over the poisoned wells of Jericho.

Scarcely have they passed over his lips, than their miraculous power takes effect. Whether they turned into another channel the streams in the depth, or changed the nature of the springs, who can say? From that hour, however, the water was all that could be desired. It was well-flavoured, refreshing, and perfectly salubrious. It spread life and vitality wherever it extended itself. The former lavish abundance is restored to the fields and the meadows by its fructifying qualities, and man and beast feel as if new born by imbibing it. In a short time, scarcely a trace of the malady which formerly pervaded Jericho, can be discovered. The ever-sickening and haggard race becomes a vigorous and blooming people. Cheerfulness and athletic activity everywhere prevail. A renewed and joyful industry pervade the aged and the young, and blessing abounds in every direction. In the luxuriant vineyards, the exultations of the reapers resound anew, and are joyfully responded to by the solitary song of the shepherd, surrounded by his fleecy charge. The farmer thinks only on procuring stronger horses for the heavy and unctuous clods of the fields and new and more spacious granaries for his mighty harvests; whilst the traveller boasts, that nowhere has he met with water so pleasing and refreshing as that of Jericho, and commends it to this hour.

What a rich and glorious manifestation of God, therefore, is contained in this miracle! How brilliantly do his power and his love display themselves in it! What a grand seal does it, at the same time, impress upon the Divine vocation of the prophet! Who could in future doubt in

whose name and armour the man came forth! and in what lovely radiance did this act envelop the whole prophetic mission of the seer. Never did a herald of Jehovah commence his career in such a truly evangelical manner as he. The removal of a curse, which had lain heavy upon the country for upwards of five hundred years, is his first work; the restoration of a ruined earthly paradise, the first legitimation of his heavenly mission.

We wait in the present day, for a spiritual renewal of the miracle performed at Jericho; we long for it; we entreat it. Ah, our springs are also stagnant, polluted, poisoned, and foam out fatal streams which threaten moral destruction, not merely to a city and country, but a world. What springs are they? I mean the dominant mode of thinking of an age estranged from God; the moral and political principles, which like evil leaven, have begun to pervade the mass of the people; and already influence the sentiments and mode of acting of many thousands. I mean intellectual attainments, which in dreadful estrangement from all that is Divine, seek to embrace along with the narrow limits of the material world, the whole universe of existing things. I mean the arts and sciences, which have scoffingly bid adieu to their original destiny of being intimations of a future world, in order to devote their colours or their tones to all that is mean and base, and to envelop sin in radiance and splendour. I refer to those poets, whose wit is inflamed by hell, whose inspiration is animal passion, and in whom, a bold mockery at all moral and social decorum occupies the place of talent and genius. I refer to a theology, which speaks "of its own," even as the father of lies, which like him, only negatives; and though clothed in an angel's garb, only watches, like a faithful servant, over the interests of Lucifer in the Church.

I refer to a philosophy, whose object is decidedly to expel the God of gods from his seat, and to annul the difference between the creation, and Him whose fiat called it into being ; and of a policy, which with incomparable absurdity and impiety, scoffs at the constitution which the King of kings has given to the world, and seeks to instal man, that handful of dust, into the honour of the monarch of the world, and to elevate the arbitrary will of a sinful worm to be the only valid law, the Thora of the people! Ah, whilst regarding all this, who does not perceive, that we are in a similar situation with Jericho, and that our springs are also poisoned! What remains, when looking at the foaming waters of modern journals and periodicals, in which these springs pour their waters through the land, than the complaint of the inhabitants of the city of palms, "The water is naught, and the ground barren." But ye Elishas, to whom the salt of the good old word is intrusted, scatter it wherever you go. Although you may carry it in vessels of new and various forms, yet let that which they contain, be always the original, ancient, and uncorrupted salt; for that alone does wonders. Cast it, in the name of the Lord, into the slimy waters of this world and the present age. With this Divine salt ye shall accomplish incomparably greater things than Elisha did with his. You salt the world. "Then shall the wilderness and the solitary place be glad, and the desert rejoice and blossom as the rose."

II.

THE JUDGMENT AT BETH-EL.

“THEY compass me about like bees”—is the Lord’s complaint in the twelfth verse of the hundred and eighteenth psalm. We are well aware what and who he means. His eyes rest upon Calvary. His executioners, his murderers, are the bees, and are properly so termed; for they have formed honey in Judah’s lion. If the Divine treasury in Christ had not been opened to us by the spear and the nails; if his blood had not been shed—what would Christ be to us? It is CHRIST CRUCIFIED, to whom we are indebted for everything.

“They compass me about like bees.” Yes, he may say so even to this day. The whole world, and every individual Church hangs full of wasps’ nests. Every thing goes on smoothly, as long as the man with the crown of thorns is kept behind the scene. But to bring him upon the stage, is like boring into nests. Swarms immediately put themselves in motion, whet their stings, and there is no end to the humming and the buzzing. It is Christ whom they sting, and those who side with him.

“They compass me about like bees.” This had reference also in a better sense to believers. Christ is the “Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the valley.” The believers are the bees that swarm about the rose, sighing, rejoicing, hungering, and enjoying; fluttering around it, either with the wings of prayer or the pinions of delight; and there is no end to the humming about this flower, both

day and night, in the true Church. From it we derive our honey every day—forgiveness, peace, courage, and strength; and its fulness is inexhaustible. Many Christians are indeed only working bees; day after day they swarm and flutter about the rose, and never properly attain to rest. But how great is their folly!

Observe on a summer's evening, how other bees act, and then go and do likewise. Wearied by the heat and labour of the day, they slumber peacefully in the calix of flowers. The latter enclose them with their tender leaves, and the gentle whispers of the evening zephyr, rock the reposing and well-secured insect on its balmy couch. How sweet the rest! So do thou also slumber in the calix of the Rose of Sharon. Forget thyself in thinking of Jesus. Be he thy all, and his promises and merits the covering over thee, and the pillow beneath thy head. O then, what does it matter if the tempest howls without and croaking night-birds flutter around thee! Soft is thy couch, and the banner over thee is love.

2 KINGS II. 23—25.

“And he went up from thence unto Beth-el: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head.

“And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she-bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them.

“And he went from thence to Mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria.”

A surprising scene this, my friends. It would have been less so, had it occurred to us in the life, of the Tish-

bite. In the history of Elisha it appears to us as a harsh dissonance ; for where, in this event, is seen the evangelical banner of peace, as the bearer of which we had described the son of Shaphat ? The expression of deadly revenge against a petulant troop of boys ; a horrible execration pronounced upon them in the name of God ! How much in the character of the Old Testament ! How completely opposed to all that we have said of the peculiar character and vocation of Elisha, as a messenger of the loving-kindness of Jehovah ! Yet notwithstanding, summer continues to be summer, even though a November storm should roar through it to expel the vapours, and to procure the all-fructifying sun a more unlimited influence upon the earth. By a storm, with whatever awful accompaniments it may discharge itself, whilst it bursts the icy fetters which held the meadows bound, and penetrates into the softening soil—the predominance of the genial spring upon which it breaks in, is not interrupted. In the same manner, I believe, that the single thunder-clap, which we on this occasion behold suddenly and awfully interrupting the harmony of Elisha's life, which is otherwise so gentle and peaceful, by no means detracts from what we have asserted of the friendly object of the mission of this prophet. If that thunder-clap be a discord, it is only apparently so ; or if it be a dissonance, we shall find that it does not disturb the harmony of the whole, but only exalt it, and that it will solve itself in the most satisfactory manner.

Let us now approach the narrative. The mocking of Elisha is the subject of our consideration. We direct our attention, First, to **THE SOURCE OF THIS MOCKERY** ; Secondly, to **THE FACT ITSELF** ; and Lastly, to **ITS CONSEQUENCES**.

I.

We are again at Jericho, but only to bid farewell to that city for a period. Elisha has received marching orders, and we will now prepare to accompany him on his first prophetic journey. He has ceased to be his own master. The whisperings of a voice now hover o'er his head, which imperatively point out his path to him, and whose directions entirely divest him at least of anxiety with respect to his future prophetic proceedings. It may be more pleasant to the flesh, as long as its walk and conduct is left to itself; but it is infinitely more safe and blissful to pass even through the Red Sea, when we have received a command from the clouds, and are travelling with a passport, which has been signed and sealed in the cabinet of heaven. The name of the Lord is a strong and wonder-working staff; foaming billows are divided before it, and mountains become valleys. Elisha left Jericho without a companion, but he was not therefore alone. He took with him many a heart full of gratitude and love. Thousands of well-meant blessings formed his friendly escort. The sons of the prophets had spent memorable and happy days in the warm sunshine of his peaceful society. The whole city blessed the man of God as a deliverer; for what they owed him was more than gold and silver. Elisha had left behind him a glorious memento at Jericho, in the hearts of the people, as well as in the country itself—a memento, however, erected not so much to himself, as to him whose interpreter and agent he was, and who says, “My glory I will not give to another.”

Elisha took his way from Jericho to Beth-el, which lay only a few leagues distant from it. This city, with which you are already acquainted from the history of the patriarchs, no longer responded to its beautiful name. The

fiery zeal of the prophets called it Beth-aven—the house of vanity; for, together with Dan, it was the seat of that political worship, which Jeroboam, to complete the separation of the kingdom of Israel from Judah, had introduced, according to the suggestions of a mean and God-forgetting policy. He there built what was termed a sanctuary, in order to appease the longing of the people for the temple at Jerusalem. Two golden calves were set up as the representatives of the cherubim above the ark of the covenant, or even as symbols of Jehovah himself; for, “Behold,” said the king to the people, “these are thy gods, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt!” A priesthood arbitrarily instituted, occupied the place of the house of Aaron, and a multitude of unmeaning usages, borrowed from Paganism, mimicked the beautiful and significant worship of the ancient tabernacle, and only served gradually to expel from the minds of the deluded people, not only the hope of a Messiah, but also the last idea of the true adoration of God. Horrible impiety, not only to enlist that which is the most sacred to mankind into the service of a carnal policy, but even with a daring hand to model it according to its interests! Israel is not the only instance of such an execrable transaction. Similar things have often taken place in the world; but such daring impiety has never escaped the most awful recompense. Think of the enlightened terrorists of the period of the French Revolution; of the laurel-crowned hero of modern history. You know how they, with the policy of a Jeroboam, not only changed times and seasons, but also instituted Beth-el worship, and thereby endeavoured to expel the ancient faith as well as the ancient worship of God. But what became of these daring moderns? The thunders of Divine vengeance have crushed them. Their bodies lie

covered with execrations and reproach in solitary graves, and their souls—may God have had mercy on them!

That Jeroboam's wickedness succeeded at the time, is not to be wondered at, considering the natural corruption of mankind. Have not the spiritual Jeroboams, the hypocritical advocates of a false enlightening, succeeded in the present day, in a similar manner, who, in order to separate the people from the temple of the true Church, did not altogether deny the necessity of a temple in general; but built near the temple a Beth-aven, and then raised a loud cry, exclaiming, "Here, here is Jerusalem, here shines the pure light, here glitters the true Church." Yes, they have also a god; but one who is as easily distinguished from the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as the golden calves at Beth-el from him that dwelt in the sanctuary on Mount Moriah. A Christ is also honoured there, as a matter of course; but one from whose head they have torn, with impious hands, the regal diadem; whose breast they have stripped of the priestly shield; and of whose prophetic mantle they have left only a few shreds. There is also devotion there, and hours of devotion: imagine to thyself a little effeminate warmth of feeling, and thou art acquainted with it; reflect thyself complacently in a sentimental emotion, which is excited in thee, and thou possessest it. Prayer is likewise not wanting; but it is a prayer of the strangest description; a prayer made by the man *to himself*; an affected sensibility, which is devoid of an object; an exclaiming of a few Ah's and Oh's, which in reality desire nothing, and viewed in the light, have reference to no one. You are acquainted with those highly commended volumes, upon whose foam-like and trivial contents, this modern Christian temple erects itself. You know how this Beth-aven is resorted to in crowds. Israel

has forgotten Jerusalem and the true sanctuary! but woe to the deluded people, and a three-fold woe to their malicious deceivers!

Elisha was not the man for a city like that of Beth-el. Where was the wonder, that from such a nest of unbelief and darkness, this witness to the light experienced nothing but the hissings of mockery and blasphemy. It was not allotted solely to the saints of the new covenant to experience the truth of the saying, "I am not come to sent peace, but the sword." The saints of every age have often been compelled to feel, in a sufficiently painful manner, the sting of that enmity, which from the beginning was divinely placed between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. If the hatred of the children of the world against the children of God, who do nothing to injure them, appears a mystery, its satisfactory explanation is found in those words of our Lord, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." The world is unwilling that we should differ from her, and that we should exalt ourselves above her moral sphere. She desires that we should continue strictly within her limits, and make her thinking, and feeling, her judging, acting, and pursuits our own. As long as we accommodate ourselves to this, we are in favour with the world. If, on the contrary, we show signs of conversion, the question of peace or war is decided. But is it not conceivable, that from that moment, the world cannot bear us? For what is it we do, in separating ourselves from her works and ways? Do we not by so doing condemn them as unholy and perverted? What is the consequence of our withdrawing ourselves from her vanities and enjoyments? Do we not, by this act,

pronounce a sentence of rejection upon her, more powerfully and loudly than could be done by words? The appearance of a truly converted individual places too forcibly the opposite of their own profane doings before the eyes of the children of this world, for them to become fond of such a phenomenon. It reminds them too powerfully of the necessity of their becoming different characters, as well as the possibility of soaring to a higher and holier course of life, than that which they pursue. But they dislike being reminded of this necessity; and gladly leave the question of this possibility to rest upon its own merits. They are vexed at being disturbed in the sweet and fatal repose of this security. They love darkness, self-deception, and lies. Where is the wonder, therefore, that they should shun the light, and hate those who bring it down into their darkness!

If, my friends, we have had only little experience of this enmity of the world on the whole, it is not the best sign with respect to ourselves. This circumstance ought to induce us to reflect, and the more so, since we know the word of the Lord, "Blessed are ye, when men shall speak all manner of evil against you, for my sake, and persecute you;" and again, "Woe unto you, when all men speak well of you!" The seal of our superior descent probably does not appear strongly enough impressed upon us, and too much cause perhaps is given, on our part, to the unconverted, for the supposition so consolatory to them, that it is only the outward form and the religious appearance, which distinguishes us from them; and that internally we stand on the same footing with them. Do not let us conceal it from ourselves, my friends, that the world is still so gracious to us, only because we can still associate so intimately with the world. The lukewarmness of our re-

ligion produces that toleration which we experience on her part. Only a little more of that Divine salt is wanting, and of that fire from the altar of the sanctuary in our deportment, and she will soon alter her position towards us. He, in whom Christ is formed, cannot pass unmolested through Dan and Beth-el. He will become to foes a savour of death unto death, and unto friends a savour of life unto life.

II.

Elisha proceeded on his journey, solitary, and lost in thought. The events of ancient times hovered around his affected soul, and excited in it a feeling of longing. The patriarchal world, with its venerable forms and peaceful living images, lay like a garden of God before the eye of his memory. The wondrous imagery of the night-vision, which once ravished the slumbering patriarch in that region, presented itself in the vivid colours of a present manifestation to the inward eye of the prophet; and those mighty words of promise suggested themselves to him, which, more gratifying than even the vision of the angels on the cloudy ladder, were here addressed to the prince of Israel from the opened heavens. Alternate feelings strangely affected Elisha's breast. As powerfully as the contemplation of those pictures of the past elevated and invigorated him, so painful and heart-rending must every look have been to him, which he cast through the friendly images of ancient times upon the present and its night-like obscurity. Ah, what was now the once so holy and wondrous region! Beth-el was become a Beth-aven, a house of darkness! The place which once was dedicated to the honour of Jehovah and the glory of his name, is become a habitation of lies and of every idolatrous abomination!—

“But why,” thought Elisha, “does the Lord send me to this place to-day?” and a number of lovely stars of hope began soothingly to dawn upon the darkness of his mournful meditations. “It may again become a Beth-el, if it pleases him!” Thus thought the man of God, and hastened with redoubled speed towards the benighted place.

It had already become known in Beth-el, who it was that was approaching their gates. It is a difficult matter to take the prince of darkness by surprise. He scents the battle from afar, and his out-posts are extremely watchful. Satan regarded Elisha as a dangerous individual. The Evil One was afraid of this herald, almost more than of the Tishbite himself, although it is scarcely conceivable. How plain and insignificant was the appearance of the husbandman of Abel-Meholah, compared with that of yonder Boanerges, who bore only lightnings and flames of fire upon his lips, and spread around him scarcely anything but death and destruction! But it is not before such zealots for the law that Satan trembles the most. He knows that the law only brings wrath, embitters, and tends to drive the sinner further from the presence of God, rather than to induce him to resign himself to the Lord. The Gospel, on the contrary, the message of grace, always causes Satan the most serious anxiety. He knows, with respect to these glad tidings, that they melt, move, allure, and persuade. He knows the attractive power which lies concealed within them. Hence he is never more active than when this wonder-working trumpet is sounded on his borders. How, therefore, could he remain neutral, when he saw Elisha, the bearer of the Divine standard of peace, approach one of his most devoted cities. He was aware what this preacher of help and salvation had accomplished in Jericho, and that little was wanting to have induced the whole

city to have cited with him and his God. The mere idea, that something similar, or even more, might take place at Beth-el, make the old serpent foam. He hastily takes his measures, and is at no loss for accomplices. The lying priests are selected for the execution of his plan of operation. He informs them of the danger which menaces them; he excites their fury, and points out the weapons by which they may the most successfully oppose the enemy of their influence and authority. But the priests—as we imagine to ourselves the progress of the affair—hesitate to appear in person in the contest. They make their pupils acquainted with the impending danger. This young viperous race think themselves strong enough to enter the lists with the hated prophet, and make themselves responsible, not only to drive him back from the borders of their city, but also to render him averse ever to return to it.

Elisha arrives within the precincts of the idolatrous place. He comes not to curse and destroy: the merciful object of his visit is to collect the backsliders under the banner of grace. Suddenly, a noisy youthful troop rushes out of the gates of Beth-el, like a savage host, forty-two in number. “Little children” is the expression used in the narrative, but the original implies young people of from fifteen to eighteen years of age. They surrounded the man of God at some distance, burst into loud laughter, and are daring enough to foam out the bitterness of their hearts against him, in the basest and most impious mockeries. They select the prophet’s bald head as the aim of their insults; for a bald head was regarded by the vulgar in Israel as something disgraceful, because it was an usual consequence of leprosy to deprive the head of its *crown*, as the hair was wont to be called, and because the naked-

ness of the upper part of the head was regarded as a sign, not only of bodily weakness, but also of moral imbecility. Thus, there was a very wicked meaning in the term "*bald head*," which these knaves applied to the man of God. We have here not to do merely with an eruption of youthful petulance. It is the considerably pointed and satanically poisoned arrows, that fly from refined wickedness, which whiz here. What else was meant by "bald head" than weakling! leper! "We will soon get the better of thee, thou ridiculous hero. We fear thee not, thou prophetic impostor." And the impious addition, "Go up," or, more strictly speaking, ascend! soar aloft! what else is meant but, "Send for horses like thy master! ascend the fiery chariot, and get thee gone through the clouds!" It is consequently a scoffing allusion to the ascension of Elijah, being in part an impious suspicion of the fact, and in part a ridiculing of Elisha; as if they had said, "Thou mimic of Elijah, prove to us that thou art a prophet. If thou art able to do any thing, let us see it." Therefore, in every case, more than a mere eruption of childish petulance. It is devilishness, conscious wickedness, bitter sarcasm, intentional blasphemy of that which is sacred. Towards the Tishbite, they certainly would not have acted thus. They knew that he was not to be jested with. Elisha's mildness, on the contrary, unfettered the unclean spirits in their heart. But the circumstance of their being able, with their hatred, to overcome the force of love which beamed upon them from the whole appearance of the prophet, renders their impiety only the more flagrant and atrocious.

Ah, who can defend himself against the profoundest grief at the sight of these youths thus irrecoverably lost! How much better had it been for the young wretches had

they been resigned, whilst sucklings, to the fiery arms of Moloch, than, by escaping this death, to die eternally, as the victims of sin and Satan, of the gangrene of judicial hardness! and tell me, has this viperous brood disappeared from the earth with the forty-two at Beth-el? Would it were the case, and that the rising generation of the present day, not only amongst us, but every where, did not teach us the very reverse! And it is this which grieves us the most deeply in the present evil times, that we look around us amongst them in vain for an anchorage of hope with respect to the future. It is this which pains us most to the heart, that we perceive the practice, at least, of those profane and ungodly theories, which their fathers have drunk down like an intoxicating potion, ingrafted also into the rising generation. Alas! the evil crops of your own sowing are already shooting up in luxuriant fecundity around you. You have eaten sour grapes, and your children's teeth are set on edge. You have conjured up spirits at which you are now yourself horrified. You would gladly lay them again; but where is the incantation to which they will listen? You now reap the fruits of your own devices. You piped songs of liberty to your children, and you now see them dancing, alas! upon your own authority. You tore down the limits of the Divine word and reverence for it; and therefore ascribe it to yourselves, ye parents, guardians, and teachers, that a troop of youthful rebels now rages around you, of the restraining of whom you already begin to despair. You taught them to regard the religion of the Bible as a disgraceful chain, prepared by the superstition of a benighted age, and its preachers as proud priests and ambitious Jesuits. Your pupils were, alas! only too susceptible and docile. We now command them, for God's sake, to honour father and

mother; you are aware how little attention they pay to our admonitions. You have said much to them of the years of discretion to which the present century has attained, of emancipation, and the independence of reason, and of the inalienable rights of man; see how they begin to practise these rights; and, as a just recompence, you are yourselves the first who are obliged bitterly to feel the efforts at independency made by these young autocrats. It is not that we see through a darkened glass in passing so severe a sentence upon the youth of the present day. Only go from house to house, from school to school, and listen to that which passes there, and you will convince yourselves that our complaint is an universal one, uttered the most loudly by the parents and teachers themselves. An evil and poisonous mildew lies upon the languishing plantation of the rising generation amongst us. The inmost kernel is rotten, the root is gnawed. They are a bold and obstinate race, destitute of childlikeness, and, for the most part, initiated, even in their infancy, into all the mysteries of abomination and ungodliness; in the sight of whom it no longer occurs to any one that of such is the kingdom of heaven—a race who are strangers to every thing like filial obedience, modest subjection, and tender respects for parents and superiors; who mock at the kindness with which we would gladly lead and direct them, and rise in rebellious defiance against severity. Yes, they are, in general, a race who no longer regard any thing as sacred, or as enjoining respect, or commanding reverence. In the lower classes, they are base, vulgar, and licentious; in the higher, morally unnerved, entirely pervaded by deceit, and full of intolerable and absurdly haughty presumption. God be merciful to that period for which this generation is ripening! Brethren, the foundations of the antichristian

kingdom are laid ; they are deposited in the hearts of our children ! The man of sin need only shake the tree of the nations, and his disciples will fall, like ripe fruit, into his lap and his arms. The fig-tree putteth forth leaves ; the summer is at hand. The Lord have mercy upon us, and prevent the approaching destruction !

III.

We now know how we have to regard the blaspheming rabble before the gates of Beth-el. It is more than a troop of petulant boys ; it is a horde of young villains, who, sold to the father of lies, have taken a decided part against the kingdom of light and of truth. They come as the representatives of their native town, and, in reality, in the devil's name, who hopes, by their means, to annihilate, with a single blow, the further labours of the prophet, and thus inflict a deadly wound upon the cause of God. And, in fact, the plan of attack is not unwisely contrived, but perfectly worthy of its cunning inventor. For reflect, if the rebels had so far succeeded that their mockery of the man of God had remained unpunished, what would have been the consequences ? The respect for Elisha would then have been for ever at an end with the great mass of the people. The hardness of his adversaries would have reached its extreme height, and have broken through the last opposing barrier. During the whole of his life, Elisha would then have remained the butt of vulgar wittings and wicked mockers, and could no longer have shown himself unmolested amongst the idolatrous race. But this was the very thing which the old adversary aimed at by his youthful auxiliaries. Elisha's moral influence was to be neutralized on the outset ; his prophetic labours for ever trodden under foot from the very commencement ; he was to be

stripped of the halo of a superior mission, caricatured in the eyes of the multitude, and stamped in the public opinion as an impostor and a fool, who wished to act the part of a second Elijah ; nay, if I may so speak, as a spiritual Quixote.

Do we not continually see the old adversary operating in this manner against the witnesses of God ? If he does not succeed in rendering them suspected by the people, as hypocrites and Jesuits, he places a fool's-cap upon their heads and ridicules them as simpletons, abstruse speculativists, whimsical enthusiasts, and mock-apostles. By means of this stratagem, as you know, he once laboured to overthrow the influence of your never-to-be-forgotten Herminghaus, and break the point of the powerful sword of the Spirit, which he wielded. Yes, at that time, the prince of darkness was no longer secure in Gemarke. He felt that " the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof " were assaulting his dominion. He therefore blew to arms ! and there were, alas ! no want of those who prepared themselves for the battle. Here also was Beth-el. The power of your preacher was to have been broken by contemptuous derision. But he stood like a rock, and continued to testify with joyful lips of his Lord Christ, not so intent, as we frequently are, to see the reproach of the cross, at least in some respects, counterbalanced or else sweetened by the reputation of a powerful eloquence. And God was with the dear man ; and if he did not send lions amongst the mockers, yet he sent thunderbolts in the shape of bankruptcy and beggary, whilst he branded others with public contempt. But he raised his servant from the dust into which they sought to tread him down, redoubled the weight and sharpness of his word, and blessed his labours so obviously, that even the wicked were obliged secretly

to confess and say, "The Lord is with him; who can fight against God!"

The transaction, therefore, at the gates of Beth-el, was not an object to be passed over in silent forgiveness and forgetfulness. The attack upon the cause of God was of too serious a nature, and, in case of success, too decisive to permit the way of evangelical mildness and sufferance to be taken in this instance. Forbearance would have here been retreat and defeat. The injunction, "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also," was not applicable here. The violent assault of hell required to be repulsed with violence. Elisha himself felt this in a lively manner. It would have been easy for him, as regarded his own person, to pass over the mortification inflicted by these slanderers; but higher considerations enjoined here different procedure. As we have already observed, the whole authority of the man of God was now at stake, and with it the future results of his prophetic labours. In this case, the rising emotions of forgiving compassion and forbearing love were obliged to be mute, and to be offered up to the Lord's glory and his cause—a painful piece of self-denial for a man of kindness and meekness like Elisha; but the Spirit supported him, and superior considerations gained the ascendancy in his soul. The man of God turned about, regarded with holy indignation the reprobate crew, and, as the narrative informs us, "cursed them in the name of the Lord."

Many expositors have been desirous of softening the matter, and of having it understood as if the prophet had only reproved these mockers for their impiety, and threatened them with Divine judgment and punishment in the event of their continuing impenitent. But this attempt to rescue Elisha's honour is as improper in this place as it is

ill-founded. The words of the narrative compel us to believe that Elisha, under the influence of a superior impulse, really prayed against the reprobates, and directly denounced the vengeance of Heaven upon them. Full of zeal for the honour of Jehovah, he *cursed* them. He exclaimed, "The Lord recompense this wickedness on your own heads;" and the Lord, concurring with his messenger, that it was requisite to frustrate Satan's intended triumphs in a striking and impressive manner, whatever it might cost, confirmed the anathema of Elisha on the spot; and you know with what a dreadful seal he substantiated it. Scarcely had the awful execration passed from the lips of the prophet, when two furious bears broke forth from the neighbouring wood as the horrible executioners of the Divine vengeance; they seize upon the young blasphemers, and begin to tear them asunder, one after another, until the whole of the two-and-forty lie swimming in their blood. The two dreadful avengers then return quietly into the obscurity of the forest, without injuring a hair of the man of God. Horrible execution! An awful lesson for Beth-el and the whole circumjacent country!

It is most evident that this punishment was of Divine infliction. These ravenous animals are otherwise never wont to show themselves so near a town, especially in open day. If they ever venture into the less shady borders of the forest, the slightest noise, or the sight of a few men, is sufficient to scare them back again into their retreats. Only when compelled by violent hunger do they ever attack mankind, and then only singly. It was a thing never before heard of, that two of these animals should seize upon a troop of forty-two vigorous youths; nor was it hunger which urged them to the attack on this occasion, which is evident from the striking circumstance, that they

did not devour their victims, but after having rent them asunder, left them lying in their blood. It must therefore be most apparent to every one, that this awful event was nothing else than an arrangement of an angry God, who, by means of his all-superintending power, forced the two bears into the service of his holy indignation, even as previously the ravens of Elijah into that of the providing love.

The concurrence had its results. Though it might not be able to alter the sentiments of the idolatrous adversaries, yet it laid bit and bridle upon them, and for a considerable period, secured not only the prophet, but also the whole Church of God in Israel, at least against grosser attacks and injuries. By its means, and in accordance with the Divine intentions, the same object was attained as in former times at the foot of Sinai, by the sanguinary execution of the worshippers of the golden calf, and on the threshold of the New Testament ecclesiastical era, by the dreadful judgment upon Ananias and Sapphira. Fear and terror took possession of the whole people. The words, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked," were seen, not merely inscribed upon parchment, but written on the ground in letters of blood. A deep and terrific impression of the Divine severity, bound in brazen fetters, for a long period, the spirits of blasphemy and mockery. The sons of the prophets—that is, those at Beth-el—now enjoyed rest from all the troubles and oppressions which they had long endured. Not the bears themselves, but the horrifying images of these two roaring executioners continued lying, as protecting sentinels, at the threshold of their cottages. Elisha himself also bore them, henceforward, in his insignia, as a foil, so to speak, to his prophetic authority, and as affording a powerful emphasis to his testimony. If I may be allowed the expression, they surrounded the rose of his

kind and benignant aspect with the necessary thorny defence. From this time he also stood in majestic panoply upon the field. Wherever he appeared, the shield of the Lord was seen above his head, and the sword of the Almighty ready, when requisite, to take his part against his adversaries.

But however greatly this Divine judgment upon the youthful band of blasphemers tended to establish the authority of our prophet; and however considerable the assistance which was thereby afforded to his labours in Israel, as well as to the good cause in every respect; yet the mind of the man of God was very differently affected by it to what might have been anticipated. Far from rejoicing, as the greatness of the victory seemed to require, he left the bleeding scene of his triumph deeply moved and abased; and if any one complained, with grief, that these measures of judicial severity had been rendered necessary, for the sake of the glory of God, it was Elisha himself. Another would certainly not have so soon withdrawn himself, but would first have awaited the brilliant results of the awful punishment which had been inflicted, and would have been desirous of feasting upon and refreshing himself with the amazement of the inhabitants of Beth-el, the sudden change of the position of the adversaries towards him, and the manifestations of respectful homage with which they would now meet him. But Elisha, far from lusting after such triumphs, hastily departs from the place, as if it had been he who had suffered the defeat, and seeks solitude and retirement. Can this surprise us? The amiable prophet had been suddenly translated, with his mind and his principles of action, into a sphere which was entirely strange to the friendly and evangelical man. He who was inclined only to pardon and to spare, is com-

pelled to be angry and to curse; he who was inwardly organized, as few are, exclusively for the office of comforting and healing, sees himself, all at once, armed with the sword of the Divine vengeance, and compelled to spread death and destruction around him, Ah! he only felt as if he himself had suffered a defeat, and as if he had been torn out of all the joints and hinges of his being. The idea of the amazing event he had accomplished lay like a mountain upon his heart; for not only did the bloody corpses of those that had been rent asunder, hover before his eyes, but much more so the deplorable souls which *he* had for ever execrated into the pit of hell. How shall he regain his former peaceful state of mind, of which the dreadful and awful act had entirely deprived him? How shall he calm the surging sea of feeling in his breast, the raging storm of pain, amazement, compassion, and horror, which roars through his soul! Certainly it is not hidden from him, that it is the Lord who bade him curse. But this consciousness beams only like the pale moon, between clouds, upon the wild uproar of his mind. It sends down only faint and single glimmerings of consolation into the gloomy and stormy feelings of his soul. The idea, "I have done this!" is the prominent sound in the inward tumult; is the thundering peal which swallows up the soothing tones of consolation as they ascend, like the ocean does the drops of rain. Elisha is constrained to hold converse with the Lord his God. He must recover breath in the arms of Jehovah, and regain his composure. He must have it confirmed and sealed by him anew, and with a strong emphasis, that he hath done right, and has acted only in his name, from his impulse, and as his instrument. He therefore hastens with rapid steps from Beth-el, and wanders towards Mount Carmel, in order, in its solitary and

silent groves, to pour out his unspeakably oppressed heart before the Lord, and to recollect and refresh himself after the painfully affecting impressions of that awful event

We now leave him, and conclude our meditation, strengthened in the blissful conviction, that in the sight of God, his people's honour and his own is but *one*, and that he sees in every attack upon the apple of his eye, a crime against his own majesty. With this consciousness, it is in reality a small thing resignedly to endure the injuries of the world. We then observe the darts which have been shot at us, flying beyond us and upwards through the clouds, and do not become enraged at the archers, but rather tremble for them, and feel inclined to commend them to the sparing mercy of God. True it is, that God does not so manifestly take the part of his people now as he did in the case of Elisha at Beth-el. If he is desirous of avenging us of our slanderers, he punishes them at present more by concealing our real glory than by unveiling it before their eyes. This belongs to the nature of that kingdom, of which we are the citizens, which, for the time being, is still a kingdom of the cross, and which bears for an inscription over its portals, and for an indication of the way by which the Lord intends to lead us, the words, "From faith to faith." A day is, however, approaching, in which the king will remove the veil from his daughter Zion, and place her, as his elect bride, in all her splendour before the eyes of her enemies. What astonishment will then be felt; what amazement; what embarrassed and downcast looks! Until that period, let whoever will mistake and calumniate us, we know who we are, we contemplate our beauty in the mirror of the word, and travelling incognito, has also its peculiar charm, and affords its particular pleasure. Amen.

III.

THE MARCH AGAINST MOAB.

“My tongue is the pen of a ready writer,” says the Royal Psalmist, at the commencement of the forty-fifth psalm, when on the point of inditing a good matter; and of singing concerning a king, who is fairer than the children of men, and whose throne shall continue for ever and ever. Who that ready writer was, to whom David alludes, who uses his tongue as a pen, is sufficiently obvious. The writer is the Holy Spirit, by whose inspiration the king played and sang, prophesied and composed. The Divine seers were all instruments of this Spirit, who moved their lips to utter his sayings, and employed their spirits as a channel for the communication of eternal things to the people, and who made use of their tongue as a pen, to express his instructions and his mysteries.

Hence it might frequently be the case, that these men of God themselves understood only little of what they were constrained to utter, although they never went away wholly unedified from thus becoming the medium of Divine communication. David does not merely say, “My tongue is the pen of a ready writer,” but also, “My heart is inditing a good matter.” His heart was therefore interested in the subject. The heralds of God whilst serving others with heavenly food, likewise partook of it themselves. But it is beyond a doubt, that much passed through their hearts, with the meaning of which they were only half acquainted; that much was only half understood, as regards its pro-

foundest sense ; and that many things remained perfectly enigmatical to them, and entirely veiled from their view.

Never probably have authors stood in such a peculiar relation to their works, and derived such a rich and abiding enjoyment from them, as the psalmists and the prophets. They were obliged to study their own writings. How often will they have subsequently met with depths and wonders in their songs and discourses, which were completely hidden from them at the time they indited them ! How many treasures of instruction and consolation, of which they previously had no idea, will have afterwards met them in their own works, as their light and knowledge increased ? Such ought also to be the case with our sermons ; and as often as we take them in our hands at a later period, we ought to be able to discover depths in them, of which we had before no presentiment. The more we speak from the Spirit, the more will this actually occur, and this is probably, the best kind of preaching.

We alone enjoy the full vintage of the vines which the psalmists and prophets planted. Now that the Sun of Righteousness has risen upon us, the whole wondrous reign of the Old Testament mysteries and sayings of the Spirit is spread out before us in the clearest light. The key of David is put into our hands, which opens every lock, and solves every riddle, and we drink full draughts from those wells, which those who dug them were only permitted partially to taste.

It is not, however, merely in the sayings of its heroes that the Old Testament incloses its mysteries and its depths, but likewise in their lives and actions. Kings and prophets were not unfrequently hieroglyphicks themselves, and their actions and the events of their lives from highly significant and emblematical characters. Elisha in particular, and

the whole age in which he lived, present themselves to us like types full of meaning, and extensive in their application. A prolific tree of life flourishes in the history of this saint—a tree laden with evangelical flowers and fruit. Come, let us gather from this lovely tree, and celebrate festivals of joy in the pleasing shade of its branches.

2 KINGS III. 9—12.

“So the king of Israel went, and the king of Judah, and the king of Edom: and they fetched a compass of seven days journey: and there was no water for the host, and for the cattle that followed them.

“And the king of Israel said, Alas! that the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab!

“But Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may enquire of the Lord by him? And one of the king of Israel’s servants answered and said, Here is Elisha the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah.

“And Jehoshaphat said, The word of the Lord is with him. So the king of Israel, and Jehoshaphat, and the king of Edom, went down to him.”

To-day we take the field. A camp is the scene of our narrative. Arms and banners surround us, the sound of horns and trumpets thrills in our ears. The event we have to consider contains much that is attracting and instructive. Let us therefore approach it. THE DISTRESS OF THE KINGS, and THEIR RESORT TO THE PROPHET, are the two points which shall occupy our attention on this occasion.

I.

King Jehoram had been constrained by a vexatious affair to declare war. The Moabites, a heathenish people on the southern borders of his kingdom, had planted the standard of liberty, and were in open rebellion. This rest-

less nation, whom God had given into the hands of the Israelites, and over whom David had exulted, saying, "Moab is my wash-pot," had several times endeavoured to shake off the Hebrew yoke; but had as often painfully experienced what an evil thing it is to fight against the people of the Most High. But they had now revolted in a more serious manner than ever. They flew to arms in great numbers, and with king Mesha at their head, declared themselves free and independent, and seemed resolved rather to perish than pay any longer the disgraceful and burdensome tribute to the princes of Israel. Observe how, in every respect, there is nothing new under the sun. Does not what I have just stated, sound like an article from the latest journals? The rulers who have at present to contend with their rebellious subjects, do not stand alone in their sorrow. They find companions in their fate in every age, and even amongst the kings of Israel. The rebellion of the Moabites naturally deserved the epithet of a culpable transgression; but this did not prevent its being, at the same time, a divinely ordered punishment upon Jehoram. The latter had forsaken the God of his fathers, and devoted himself to the worship of the calves. He was now to feel what he had done, for which purpose God loosed the chain of the Moabitish lion, and let him act as he pleased.

When Jehoram received the disastrous intelligence of the revolt of Moab, he did not regard it as a trifling matter, but went energetically to work, and far from being willing to treat with the rebels, which he justly regarded as beneath his dignity, he drew the sword, and resolved to oppose force with force. In this undertaking, nothing stood in his way, for there was no other power that was inclined to recognize the independency of these revolters, much less to support their cause. On the contrary, the king of Judah,

the pious Jehoshaphat, was ready at Jehoram's request, to lend him his aiding hand in quelling the insurgents, and even personally to bring into the field a part of his numerous legions against Moab. "I will go up," wrote he from Jerusalem to the king of Israel, "I am as thou art; my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses."

After the two princes had combined their forces, the question arose, which was the best rout to take. "I am of opinion," said Jehoram, "that we ought to go through the wilderness of Edom." They accordingly did so, and arrived in Edom. The vice-king of that country, who was tributary to Jehoshaphat, was obliged to join the host with his army; and thus they marched through the spacious inhabitable wilderness of Edom against the enemy, who, intoxicated with their freedom, had already taken the field, and contemplating their numerous troops as well as their enthusiasm, did not doubt for a moment the glorious success of their cause.

Our three allied powers flattered themselves with the same hope with respect to their enterprize. They also, at least the kings of Israel and Edom, made flesh their arm. The excellent discipline and military training of their legions inspired them with courage, and did not permit them to doubt that their first engagement with the enemy would prove his overthrow, and prepare the way for their march to his capital. But here it happened as it so frequently does under similar circumstances. Israel miscalculated as well as Moab. The affair terminated very differently to what either party had anticipated. The children of Abraham, no less than the heathen, were to be again convinced, that what decides a war, is not an arm of flesh, nor human sagacity; but the nod of another, who does as he pleases with the powers in heaven and in earth, and who is a gen-

eralissimo over the host of nations. The lot falls according to the decision he takes and the party he sides with. He gives courage, or takes it away, to and from whom he pleases. The success or failure of the sword and the bow come both from him. Victory sides with him who fights beneath his banner. Out of alliance with him, is being doomed to destruction. When he marches his host into the field, who can oppose him? Instead of arrows, he sends burning sun-beams from on high, and the legions languish: He fights with the benumbing breath of frost, and the hands of his adversaries are bound with invisible fetters. He calls pestilence and famine into the field, and then what avails the general his skill, or the hero his strength? He makes the horses restive and their riders foolish; there is then an end of them notwithstanding all their superiority in strength, prudence, and stratagem, and children overcome and put to flight whole squadrons inured to victory.

It was an imposing armed force, at the head of which the kings of Israel and Judah marched against Moab. All the world was of opinion that such an army only needed to show itself to put a stop at once to the Moabitish revolt, and was ready to say, 'This is a war, which will be terminated as soon as begun. But before they are aware, a power takes the field against Israel, of which certainly no one had thought; and this was nature, with a thousand obstacles and terrors; and in fact there wanted but little, and the whole armed host would have perished before reaching the borders of Moab. For after they had advanced a few days' march into the wilderness of Edom, it became so hot, that in a short time all the waters round about were dried up, and a faintness spread itself through the army, the precursor of entire debility and death. The increased thirst of the soldiers soon consumed the stock of

water they had taken with them, and the numerous hosts are left in a deplorable condition, in danger of dying the most dreadful of all deaths. The generals order a march, to try to reach more favourable and better watered regions; but in vain; they enter only the more deeply into the desert and the burning sand. No where can a fountain or cistern be found, nor even a shady wood to afford a short refreshment in the wide waste. Around them lies the level and heated heath, and they are continually exposed to the scorching hot wind, and the suffocating sultriness. For seven days together they had marched about, and no longer know where they are. At length a halt is made. It is impossible to proceed. The languishing warriors sink down deadly faint, the horses stand still, emaciated and moaning, and the beasts of burden succumb, from thirst and exhaustion, beneath their burdens.

At this moment of extreme perplexity and danger, the conscience of the king of Israel, the idolatrous Jehoram, awakes. Like a lion which had been asleep, but only for the purpose of gaining fresh strength by his slumbers, it rouses within him, and begins to expound and interpret to him this unforeseen distress. And you may easily suppose what is the nature of the interpretation. It is the mischievous quality of an evil conscience to draw a black inference from every occurrence. It is a gloomy painter, to whom no night-piece seems sufficiently dark and horrible, not to need the introduction of some new traits of terror; it is a coloured mirror, in which the slightest mishap assumes the appearance of a flood of fire from the vials of the Divine wrath, a melancholy prophet, that continually predicts nothing but evil and destruction, an ill-omened bird, in a stormy night, that croaks his monotonous and spectral note indicative only of misfortune. Life take its

tinge from the conscience, and our lot on earth its colour. The conscience that has been cleansed in the blood of the Lamb scatters explanatory lights upon all the events of our existence. It invariably gives a good and cheerful signification, and deprives bitterness of its deadly sting. The evil conscience, on the contrary, sharpens it, and even inserts the sting where it fails the mark, and produces only shadow, gloom, and despondency.

Where is there a power to be found comparable to that of an accusing conscience, which with its condemning voice, fills even heroes with dismay, who otherwise would not have trembled before thousands, and, stronger than death, deprives mighty men, who are accustomed to fear nothing and no one, and even look death boldly in the face, of the brazen armour of their courage and their confidence in a moment; which is able to make us feel the validity of its sentence, even though the whole world should deny it, and applaud and eulogize our names in opposition to it; and which transmutes into gall that which is the most valuable to us in the world if we are obliged to enjoy it under the thunder of its reproaches. "The voice of an evil conscience," says Luther, "is not one evil in particular, but a multitude of evils. It is a barking hellhound, a monster vomiting fire, a raging fury, a tormenting devil. It is." continues he, "the nature and quality of a guilty conscience to flee and be terrified, even when all is well, and when prosperity abounds, and to change such prosperity into danger and death." "The wicked fleeth," says Solomon, "when no man pursueth; but the righteous is bold as a lion;" and Moses says, "Thou shalt be afraid of the shaking of a leaf on the tree. In the evening thou shalt say, O that it were morning! and in the morning, O that it were evening!" An evil conscience is like the raging seas, which

can only be calmed by the sign of the cross of Christ. It is a gnawing worm in the bones, from the removal of which nothing less is required than the blood of the Son of God.

“Alas!”—began the king of Israel, pale and trembling in this sad perplexity—“the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab.” It is thus the Lord appears in the camera-obscura of an evil conscience. This mistrust of the guilty soul transfers its gloomy colours to the Most High himself. Even on those occasions when he is only actuated by motives of mercy, it scents nothing but gins and snares in his arrangements. In the Divine chastising rod, it never sees anything but a wrathful scourge. Preparations which he makes for the manifestation of his aiding power, appear to it as the precursors of a fatal judgment. “These three kings,” says Jehoram. Therefore not merely the viceroy of Edom, but the pious Jehoshaphat are considered by him as having come into like condemnation. “Us,” says he, “has the wrath of God destined to destruction!” He takes no notice of the moral difference between him and the prince of Judah. He will not suffer the sentiments to rise either in his own breast or in that of others, that *he* only is worthy of death, that it is he upon whom sentence is pronounced, and not Jehoshaphat: “The Lord hath called *us* together!” For in the word, *us*, there swims a drop of consolation, whilst the word *me* is accompanied only by nails and goads. The chasm-filling *us* does at least a *dividing* service with reference to the horrors of the consciousness of guilt. And even still, under similar circumstances, how gladly do the children of the world speak in the plural towards the children of God, and say, “*We* have been guilty of this and that. *We* must act better in future.” Thus the inward difference between them and

those who belong to the Lord is artfully and secretly obliterated. But the Lord knoweth them that are his, and is able in due time to resolve such-like *we's* into *I's*, and to refer back that which is applied to the aggregate, to the individual to whom it belongs.

Scarcely had Jehoram broken the silence of despair by his exclamation of woe, than Jehoshaphat, the noble prince of Judah, begins to speak. But Jehoshaphat's speech is more tranquil and composed, and appears like the expression of a heart, which is acquainted not merely with the Judge, but also with the helper in distress who is in heaven. But here, it might be asked, "If Jehoshaphat was in favour with God, why did the same misfortune happen to him as to the backsliding Jehoram?" He had only to ascribe it to himself that he came with Jehoram into these straits. He that goes hand in hand with the wicked, and makes common cause with them, must also be content to be at least thrown to the ground, when the lightning strikes the house of the former. Jehoshaphat was at liberty always to lend Jehoram his helping hand; but it was going too far in his wish to oblige, when he acted so kindly and brotherly towards him, and replied so speedily and excessively cordially to him, and said, "I am as thou art, and my people as thy people," without reminding him by a single word, that he had himself caused the revolt of the Moabites by his own revolt from the God of his fathers. Such an unseasoned civility towards an apostate idolater was a mistake, and judging of it in the mildest manner, the result of an unwise and unhallowed moment. This was therefore to be deeply impressed upon the king's mind for his humiliation and warning. For this reason he was not spared, and fell into the same straits with Jehoram. He was smitten with the same rod, and yet if we look closely at it, we

shall find it not exactly the same. Jehoram was punished; Jehoshaphat only endured the strokes of love. Anger and curse have nothing more to do with the children of God. This was effected by him who took their sins collectively upon him, and then bore them to the place of crucificial execution. In this manner he redeemed his people—as the Scripture says—from the curse of the law; he did not pluck them from it, but purchased them by giving an equivalent by a satisfactory sacrifice of his soul as an offering for sin. You inquire how matters stand since that period? I reply, excellently, if we belong to Christ. They stand now in such a manner, that there is not only no more condemnation to us, but nothing damnable can be done by us—things, alas! which are sinful, lamentable, and imperfect—but nothing damnable, nothing that exposes us again to punishment, or that can disturb or destroy the admirable relation of God towards us. The remains of our corrupt nature, which we still carry about with us—our Old Adam—is good for nothing, and never will be; but his devices shall no longer be a trap and a snare to us; he has received his punishment. God has written out the certificate of his interment. He will no longer call to mind the past. He has himself prepared the document of an eternal amnesty, which is written with the blood of the Lamb.

You ask how our affairs stand at present? They stand in such a manner, that if any one would now seek to terrify me with the threatenings of the law, I should laugh at him to the honour of Christ; and if any one were to say to me, “Beware of this thing and that, lest God should punish thee;” I would rebuke him for depreciating my Surety and his merits. They stand in such a manner, that if I were to hear a Christian say, “Such a punish-

ment I have received for such a particular fault," I at least should call him unenlightened. Punishment can no longer be inflicted on the redeemed of the Lord; because all punishment was borne by our Surety. Nothing evil befalls a Christian any longer, but only what is good; even in adversity, and what are called misfortunes, he receives only benefits, proofs of love, and blessings. Job's cup was not sweet any more than that of Lazarus; still less so was the cup of that brother at Corinth, who was delivered over to Satan for a season. Yet there was not a drop of wrath in these inflictions, nor a grain of the curse. If, so to speak, there had been only a thought of a curse in it, the righteousness of God would have been infringed upon, and our Surety would have been obliged to leave heaven again; for in that case, he could not have emptied the cup of wrath for his sheep to the very dregs, nor have atoned for the whole of their sins.

How do things stand at present? They stand thus. If I am not pleased, but heartily grieved when sin again surprises me, this is a principle of my new nature; if I despond at being again overcome, this proceeds from my unbelief and not from the truth. Thus it is at present, my brethren, that I can let the transgressions of my life pass in review before me, with feelings like those of a victorious general on reviewing his disarmed and fettered prisoners; and can regard the menaces and curses of the law, like a soldier views his spiked cannon and exploded bombs, of which he has no longer any cause to be afraid. They stand so, that I can bind together all that is beautiful, and refreshing, and all the promises in the Bible into one bunch, and say, "This is my Bible!" and that I am entitled to expel from me all the threatenings and terrors of the Scriptures, and to say, "This has no longer any reference to

me; it was nailed to the cross for me." Matters stand thus, that with regard to being saved, it is all one, whether I die to-day, or fifty years hence, since the treasury of my good works will not be greater then than it is now; for by the works of Christ, I stand accepted before God. In this respect, my friends, it is the same, whether I die in the weakest hour of my life, or in the strongest; because in the strongest I shall not stand more blameless than in the weakest; since I am blameless in Christ, and in him I am so always, and in him I am so entirely. It is thus that through the blood of the Lamb we have obtained a passport from the curse of the law, and a Divine safeguard. No one, be he who he may, is permitted to go to law with us, or bring an action against us. Who will lay anything to the charge of God's elect? Who is he that condemneth? We cannot incur any guilt which is not already atoned for in the sight of God; so much has the curse-bearing of our Surety accomplished for us! Every new deficit in our moral accounts is covered before it arises. All this is the result of the cross, that birth-place of our eternal liberty!

But we return to the narrative. King Jehoshaphat replies to Jehoram. Instead of breaking out into timid complaints, he directs the monarch's attention upwards. There is help with Jehovah. "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord," says he, "that we may enquire of the Lord by him?" How refreshingly does this voice sound in our ears in the dreary desert! The nightingales of God cannot remain silent. Though their notes be often not heard during the day in the sunshine; yet when the night falls they begin their song, and frequently sing the sweetest amid the howlings of the storm. And when under circumstances such as those, some one suddenly, though but a single individual, makes himself known amongst his com-

panions in affliction as a child of God, and a saint of the Lord ; is it not as if a consolatory star broke through the clouds, and as if a rainbow glittered in the darkness ? The scene is immediately tinged with the hue of the morning, and it seems even to the wicked themselves, as if some favourable omen had occurred.

The illustrious prince makes inquiry for a prophet. But why did he not personally bring the subject of his distress before the throne of God ? Does it not seem as if conscious guilt had also blocked up his way, and interposed a barrier ? That precious thing, which we call a perfected conscience, was not yet known to the ancient saints. The filial confidence which they exercised towards Jehovah, usually lasted only as long as it was not interrupted by some new transgression. If the latter occurred, the gloomy partition-wall of secret apprehension again erected itself, and the lips of the sinner were mute, and his eye looked timidly upon the ground, until a new propitiation and a new act of forgiveness restored breath to his oppressed soul. But it was not merely on such occasions that recourse was had to the mediation of the prophets, when an inward interdiction restrained the individual's own approach to the throne of grace. The prophets were always the characters who were gladly interposed when anything was to be transacted with God. They were regarded as the immediate officers of Jehovah's house and court, as his stewards and interpreters in the world, and as his confidants. And all this they really were. They were the organs of Divine communication, the dispensers of the Divine deliverances, the messengers between the Jerusalem which is above and the benighted earth. O do not let us attach blame to the rulers and potentates of the present day, that in evil times we are no longer wont to hear such questions, as that of

Jehoshaphat's, from their lips ! Let us not put too severe a construction upon it, when they only inquire whether there is not a tried warrior to be found, an experienced statesman, an able diplomatist. It would certainly sound only like a bitter irony upon our age, were they to ask for a prophet. The present age indeed furnishes a handful of garlands for the tombs of the prophets ; but where is there an Elisha to be found ?

One of the servants of King Jehoram replied to Jehoshaphat's inquiry, by saying, that there was a prophet in the neighbourhood. And who is this seer ? O surprising phenomenon ! It is Elisha, the son of Shaphat, " who poured water on the hands of Elijah ;" that is, the Tishbite's servant and assistant. But how is it that Elisha appears so suddenly in the neighbourhood of the camp, and in the burning and uninhabitable desert ? You remember, that after the bloody scene near Beth-el, he withdrew into retirement. His mild and gentle mind was so affected by the unwonted and awful act to which the Spirit of God had constrained him, and torn, as it were, out of all its joints, that before he could proceed with his prophetic labours, it was indispensable for him to seek renewed composure and mental recreation, and to hear again, and that more definitely from the mouth of his God, that he had done right, and in the affair had acted according to his will and its bidding. Hence he hastened with his deeply afflicted soul into retirement, and withdrew to the solitary groves of Mount Carmel. After spending a season there in prayerful intercourse with his covenant God, and re-attaining his wonted collectedness and cheerfulness of mind, he returned, in the Lord's name, to the scene of his labours, and proceeded first to Samaria. On arriving there, the united armies of Israel were on the point of

marching against Moab. The Spirit there impelled him, and love in conjunction with the Spirit, to follow at some distance the legions of his people. The weapons with which he was girded were indeed not carnal. He wore no sword, but that of the Word. His shield and breastplate was faith. Nevertheless, it appeared to him that circumstances might occur in which even he might render assistance to the host of Judah. A good saying—thought he—has already aided in gaining battles, and prayer, the prayer of faith, is itself a warlike weapon. The outstretched arms of Moses, and Samuel's wonder-working intercessions presented themselves to his soul; and thus with joyful courage, and bearing the whole nation on his priestly heart, he accompanied the armies on their march; and yet whoever would have thought, on seeing the simple and unarmed individual in his rough camel-hair dress, that he, as the instrument of the great Disposer of battles, would decide the fate of the war, and rescue the legions of Israel from the most dreadful perdition!

Scarcely is the name of Elisha mentioned, than their desponding hearts revive. "The Word of the Lord is with him," exclaims Jehoshaphat, with joyful lips. He therefore knew the prophet, and believed in his Divine mission, consecration, and illumination. How the king manifests on every occasion of what spirit he is! A man of God, in whatever disguise he may envelop himself, can never entirely deny himself. A glimmer of the hidden star of nobility which he wears, always penetrates through the covering, in order in every situation to make it apparent that he is one, who is essentially different from the world, and the world from him. But in what true and lively colours is life delineated in biblical history! It can scarcely be said to narrate; it only furnishes us with brief and sim-

ple traits; yet the characters it brings before us, are sketched with the most vivid colours. The scenes it portrays, we seem to have experienced ourselves, the persons whose history it relates are presented to us according to the whole peculiarity of their nature and character, so that we immediately apprehend them as they really are.

They wish to speak with the prophet. But how is this to be arranged? Shall they send a messenger to fetch him? This would have been done in any other case; but now no one advises it; even Jehoram is of opinion, that the servant of Jehovah might not *thus* be sufficiently honoured. The three kings therefore agree in the determination to seek out the Divine seer in person. Without delay they repair to the place where the prophet is said to have been seen. And it is not long before the object is attained, and the wished-for man is found. I imagine him sitting somewhere in the desert under the shade of a solitary pine-tree. The princes appear before him, and their entire submissive appearance and their supplicating gestures betray the object of their coming. What a scene! The three kings of Judah, Israel, and Edom, in reverential and humbly supplicating posture before the inconsiderable farmer's son of Abel-meholah! They request counsel of him under circumstances to which their wisdom is no longer competent; they expect from his hands a change of affairs, such as with all their might they are unable to accomplish. Elisha must act as their spokesman with the Almighty and procure them deliverance und victory. Elisha is their last and only refuge in distress. If any hope still animates them of a successful termination of their present distress, and of the campaign in general, it is exclusively connected with Elisha and his interference and mediation. What a triumph for the prophet, or rather for him in whose service Elisha was, and whose cause he pleaded!

Such is also frequently the case, that the servants of God in the days of distress all at once come to honour. Then, when earthly supports totter, when the resources of human power and wisdom seem exhausted, even calumniating foes are seen inclined to acknowledge, that such people are well off; nay, it is then no rare thing to see them even pressing to the pious, as if they thought themselves more secure in their vicinity than elsewhere; and if they had some presentiment of that invisible defence, with which they that fear God are everywhere surrounded. Men who previously would have responded to the visits of the quiet in the land with ebullitions of anger, have then all at once an open ear for them, and even find comfort and tranquillity in being assured of the intercessions of one of them. A pious chamberlain is then of more value to an emperor than the whole cabinet of his statesmen and generals; a prince and king probably then expects greater things from his praying lacquey and his presence, than from that of his own majesty, and from all his cavalry and infantry. Thus the world is often obliged, in a variety of ways, to confess, "Ye are the people, who are the blessed of the Lord. Your position is the correct one. Your Lord is God, and to you an access to him is granted, which does not stand open to us!" Testimonials like these, forced even from the Canaanites themselves, tend to the resplendent glorification of the Lord and his Gospel, and as renewed proofs to the children of God, that the world has nothing, when put to the test, but is dreadfully poor. But the true Christian gives God the glory, and praises him with loud rejoicings, that he has chosen him from this miserable world, and translated him into the kingdom of his marvellous light.

And if it be really so, that no judgment would have befallen the cities in the valley of Siddim, if only five righteous men had been found within their walls; and if it be in

reality the case, that the Almighty fulfils the desire of them that fear him ; and if it be true that he who prays in the name of Jesus may receive everything that he wishes out of the Divine fulness, it is indeed no mere superstition and revery when people in seasons of danger chiefly ground their hopes on the presence of holy men. No, they do not then cast their anchor into a faithless quicksand. Such men are living conductors for the districts in which their cottages stand. Where they reside, eternal love dwells also ; the gracious pinions of the Almighty are there extended ; protecting Mahanaim perambulate the spot ; the sluices of heavenly blessing are opened over them ; and invisible bulwarks elevate themselves around them, against which a thousand mischievous waves dash, break, and foam in vain. I regard the valley where we dwell as highly favoured in being able to number so many hundreds of the children of grace, and to point out whole districts in which every house is a tabernacle of God with men ; and many a house in which probably not a single Canaanite is to be found. Do you not see, my friends, that you also are fenced in, as it were, between invisible walls, on this account ; and that your borders have a thousand times become the averters of impending dangers, and that in your sky seldom anything is visible but a rainbow of peace, and the overflowing cornucopia of every Divine blessing ? Therefore do not scoff at the house of Israel in your midst, but bless it. You share with them in their benefits. And if they cannot save you from eternal ruin, unless you become one with them ! yet they are still a body-guard, and a boundary cordon, a rock which casts far round it the waves of blessing which rush down upon it, and a means of conveying to your ears and your hearts, the richest bestowments of heaven.

IV.

THE MIRACULOUS AID.

WHEN our Lord uttered the words recorded in Luke xxi. 28,—“When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh”—he recommends to us a state of mind, which certainly bears very little similarity to that which the majority of Christians manifest in the present day. We must not act at such times, like those who have suffered a defeat, nor go about, trembling and sighing, with tottering knees. We must honour God by our faith, and walk worthy of the Gospel which we possess, the promises which are given to us, and the adoption to which we have attained.

The Christian, although he is nothing in himself, possesses in Christ a nobility, a dignity, and an elevation, which he must also maintain. For the sake of Jesus and his honour, he must conduct himself according to his rank, and not demean himself. He that is free, must not become a servant; and he on whom God has bestowed an inheritance amongst the heads of his people, must not from a principle of false humility, be desirous of placing himself amongst the Gibeonites; those hewers of wood and drawers of water. Continue to speak as strongly as thou pleasest of thy personal infirmity and weakness,—for thou canst not speak too strongly of it,—but be at the same time conscious of the glory and beauty with which God has adorned thee in Christ; and in the same breath with which thou accusest and judgest thyself, boast of thy splen-

dour and regal attire. David did not forsake his throne when he kept the door in the temple. Continue to speak with emotion of the awfulness of these fatal times, and confess that inasmuch as thou regardest thyself, thou art seriously apprehensive of that which is approaching; but show thyself at the same time as a man, who because Jehovah is his refuge and his strength, is able to present a bold face to every tempest, and suffer not thyself to appear as one who is without hope.

It is true we live in a period, which seems critical in more than one respect. It appears as if the time of the great purification which awaits the Church, drew near with the rapidity of the storm. But be it so! We stand upon a rock amid the breakers, and this rock is the grace, love, truth, might, and power of our great King. Let us therefore lift up our heads. He will not suffer us to be put to confusion. If God be for us, who can be against us? May we be strengthened in this belief by our present meditation?

2 KINGS III. 13—19.

“And Elisha said unto the king of Israel, What have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother! And the king of Israel said unto him, Nay: for the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab.

“And Elisha said, As the Lord of Hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee.

“But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him.

“And he said, Thus saith the Lord, Make this valley full of ditches.

“For thus saith the Lord, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts.

“And this is but a light thing in the sight of the Lord : he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand.

“And ye shall smite every fenced city, and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree, and stop all wells of water, and mar every good piece of land with stones.”

In our last meditation, we followed the allied hosts of the kings of Israel, Judah, and Edom, into the vast wilderness of Edom. They had taken the field to quell the Moabitish insurrection. But they were overtaken in that wilderness by unexpected distress—an intolerable heat, and as a consequence of it, the want of water, which threatened the whole army with lamentable destruction, even before they reached the borders of Moab. This unfortunate occurrence deprived King Jehoram of all courage. “Alas!” cried he in despair, “the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab!” Jehoshaphat, on the contrary, that illustrious prince, retained his composure, and inquired if there was any prophet in the vicinity, of whom they might seek counsel. The answer was, that there was such a one—Elisha the son of Shaphat. The three kings immediately set out in person to seek him, and after proceeding a little way, they stood before him. We are now informed what took place between them and the man of God; and these were striking and remarkable things. Let us briefly devote our attention to them. ELISHA’S ADDRESS TO THE THREE KINGS—THE MINSTREL—and THE PROPHET’S ADVICE, are the titles to the three divisions of our meditation.

I.

The three monarchs stand in reverential posture before the prophet. He only with whom God is, bears the sceptre

and the crown. Elisha, soon guessing the reason of such unwonted condescension, prevents his illustrious guests from speaking, by addressing them himself. I doubt whether the monarchs were highly offended at this breach of etiquette. Distress can place things in a very different aspect. A heart that is trembling with painful anxiety, is not very easily offended. Still less ought we to feel surprise that our friend of Abel-Meholah is not at all disconcerted on receiving such distinguished visitors. The majesty of the Lord of the whole earth shone too brightly into the spiritual eye of men of God of his description and standing, whether they were, to suffer human dignity to make an undue impression upon them. They lived almost uninterruptedly at the court of the King of kings, whose private secretaries and whose heralds and stewards they were upon earth ; and by this means, something was imperceptibly imparted to them, of the manner in which God and his holy angels contemplate mankind, in whose eyes, all human greatness and glory generally appear very different to that which they are wont to do, when measured by our limited standard.

Elisha directs his first words to Jehoram. This weak-minded ruler deserved to be openly put to shame. When had he ever before inquired of Jehovah and his prophets ? But now on a sudden, when the Almighty has laid his hand upon him, he accommodates himself to a forced compliment, and no longer deems it beneath his dignity to apply, in the humblest manner, for advice, mediation, and aid to the farmer's son of Meholah. You think, however, that Elisha should at least have been gald of it ; but I know not for what reason. If Jehoram ever trembled before God, it was only as the devils tremble. If he desired supernatural aid, he did so merely from selfish motives, and would have

accepted it as gladly from Satan as from Jehovah. The king was in want of water, and not of grace. In that season of helplessness, he intended to employ the Lord and his prophet only once, and after attaining his object, to care neither for the one nor the other. But this manner of hiring and employing God is impious. Desire the Lord himself first, and after that his blessings.

After Elisha had fixed his eye severely upon the monarch—the lips of the man of God, which were otherwise so friendly, are changed into a tight-drawn bow-string, which darts arrows instead of words. “What have I to do with thee?” says he, “Get thee to the prophets of thy father and thy mother.” It is now Elisha’s turn to act haughtily and triumphantly. Let us rejoice at it. For it is not the triumph of human self-love, which is here celebrated; it is a triumph of Jehovah over Baal, and the victory of truth over lies. Idolatry appears in its nothingness. But that which rejoices and triumphs in the breast of Elisha is love to the Lord, and zeal for his cause.

When the hour of affliction arrives, and the life of the individual clothes itself in the garments of night, the moment has also arrived, when Jehovah and Jehovah’s Word not unfrequently assume wreaths of honour, even in the circle of their foes. It is certainly a heart-rending spectacle, when the proud philosopher suddenly becomes tremblingly conscious that the boasted truth, in which he had intended to confide, turns out to be nothing but a vessel of paper amid the raging billows of the ocean; when the bold atheist lifts up his hands in agony to the clouds, and when terror forces from him the confession, that he had mocked Him, who is now alone able to help; when the betrayer of Christ and his cross utters, time after time, the name of Jesus in anxious ejaculation, and is constrained to envy

those who have believingly resigned themselves to this deliverer ; and when the infuriated villifier of the people of God, feels himself compelled, in his pit wherein is no water, openly to declare that the people whom he has calumniated, are in happy circumstances, and that he would give a world, if he possessed it, could he only purchase with it a drop of that consolation, which those people enjoy in abundance.

But however, deeply affecting are such spectacles of despair and confusion of face, they have nevertheless their pleasing and exhilarating side. In such catastrophes, Jehovah is magnified, and the Gospel celebrates days of victory and exultation. It is only dreadful, when these miserable wretches, whilst wringing their hands in supplication to that God, on whom they had hitherto turned their backs, experience the same thing which befel Jehoram in our text ; and when the house-doors of the Almighty, which they seek, are closed against them without mercy ; when their scorning is repaid them with the same coin, and the words of thunder are heard from on high, “ What have ye to do with me ?—get ye gone to your idols ; let them help you.” Thus it happened to those, to whom the Lord said in Jeremiah ii. 27, “ They have turned their back unto me, and not their face : but in the time of their trouble they say, Arise, and save us.” “ Where are now thy gods that thou hast made thee ? let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble.” Horrible repulse ! O that none of us may ever experience it.

If the knees of the king of Israel trembled on appearing before Elisha, he is scarcely able to keep upon his feet after the prophet’s cutting salutation. “ Nay,” stammered the deeply-perplexed monarch, “ not to the prophets of my father and mother, but to Jehovah we must turn.” “ The

Lord hath called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab." He knew very well, however perverted he might be, that Jehovah was God. The conviction had already become tangible to him. But the idea of the Holy One of Israel was oppressive, and interfered too powerfully with his shameful and vicious life; hence he sought forcibly to expel it from his soul, and preferred giving place to the more tolerant images of Deity at Dan and Beth-el. But now when death is at his heels, he refuses to hear anything more of the golden calves; Jehovah shall now have the glory. But what has the Lord to do with such vacillating souls? What account does he make of homage which is the result of the most hateful selfishness? He dislikes mercenary friends as much as we. He who only loves his blessings and not himself, may as well never cross his threshold.

Elisha, little affected by the confession of his monarch, opens his mouth again, in terms of greater severity, and filled with holy indignation, says, "As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee." This is indeed speaking without reserve. Jehoram now knew how matters stood. If help appeared, it would not be on his account, but for the sake of the pious Jehoshaphat; and that in this case the ungodly man by particular favour, would be permitted to eat at the table of the righteous, although the food was not served up for him. What a humiliation of the idolatrous Prince! But it probably did not affect him very deeply. If help is but obtained, the mean-spirited man is satisfied.

But here observe, that in a certain sense, the Lord, like Elisha, assuredly regards the person. How very often

does the same thing recur in the world, which then took place in the desert? An army is preserved or conquers, as people say, because it is well disciplined, or ably commanded; and yet in the end, the entire cause of the successful result lies in the presence of a single pious man, who marches quietly and unobservedly in its ranks; but God regarded his person, and for his sake, spread his protecting wing over the whole host. A menacing scourge suddenly passes by a place without entering it. The deliverance is ascribed to some fortunate accident, or to some prudent measure of the civil authorities; but the true reason is probably to be found in the poorest and meanest cottage of the place. A man dwells there, whom the Almighty loves; and this man *prayed*. It is impossible to express how much the Lord does to please his children. Thus, for instance, for the sake of a few sheep that feed in this valley, he felt inclined to avert from the whole district, the dreadful pestilence which threatened it from the east. Yea, if only one of these, who are dear to him as the apple of his eye, had courage to request any favour of him with filial unreservedness, and whilst enveloping himself in the beauty of Christ, he would doubtless do it for him. They are once for all in possession of his heart. "I say not unto you," are the extremely significant words of Jesus, when comforting his disciples, "that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God."

II.

After Elisha had spoken to king Jehoram what he had to say to him, a scene presents itself, which at first sight, certainly exhibits something peculiar, striking and inexplicable. Elisha, without stating any reason, requests a har-

per to be sent to him. "Bring me a minstrel," says he. A person of this kind is immediately brought to him, probably from the band of military musicians. At the command of Elisha, he tunes his instrument, strikes its chords, and begins to play before the prophet in a solitary wilderness. Elisha, and the kings listen silently to the melodious notes; the latter full of expectation of what will occur—the former rising upon the pinions of the music into higher regions. We are not informed what the harper played. It was certainly not a worldly air, a march, or a war-song. The solemnity of the moment, the presence of the man of God, on whom the hopes of the whole army now reposed, must have made it evident to the minstrel what was suitable. Doubtless it was "a song of degrees," to which the strings in full harmony responded; probably one of the many psalms, which were well known in Israel, and were occasionally played and sung even in the army.

Music is a creature and gift of God. It does not indeed belong to the blessings of the first rank, which are vouchsafed to necessity, and amongst which we place our daily bread, the word of God, and the like. It perhaps belongs to the same class with the flowers which scent the air, and the various pleasing fruits, by which we are surrounded. It cannot be said to be a gift of paternal Providence, but of the gracious liberality of Jehovah—a gift which ought to contribute to the glory of his name, and to the adorning and cheering of our temporal existence. It is the universally intelligible language of feeling, to the feelings. It weaves a suitable garment for emotions, whose delicate life would expire under the weight of words. To breathe ethereal corporality upon the tenderest sensations of the soul is its office. Its sound stands in the same relation to the word spoken, as those glorified bodies, which at the

sound of the last trumpet shall arise from the graves of the saints, compared with the earthen tabernacle in which we at present reside. Music is the most wonderful, profound, and powerful, of all the arts. Where it causes its harmonious voice to be heard, it not unfrequently proves itself lord over the hearts of the auditory. It penetrates with its magic rod, into the inmost depths of our being. With the rapidity of lightning it gives the mind whatever state it pleases, and under its almost wonderworking breath, the buds of emotion unfold like the blossoms beneath the genial zephyrs of the spring. It arouses slumbering passions, and soothes them when awoke. It opens in an instant the fountains of tears within us, and fills us with nameless melancholy; a moment afterwards it pervades the heart with exulting joy, and bears it aloft on pinions of enthusiastic ardour. Hence this mover of the minds is a dangerous art, where it is drawn into the service of the world, vanity, and sin. It cannot be expressed what mischief it is capable of producing—to what a horrible conflagration it can blow up the gloomy fire of irreligious passions. On the contrary, where it continues faithful to its original vocation, and devotes its festive harmonies, in chastity and pure simplicity, to the praise of the Lord, or celebrates the works of his hands, the beautiful objects of nature, and gives utterance and expression to the better feelings of the human heart, how greatly it may contribute to beautify and ennoble life, and how much of what is lovely, good, and heavenly, it may interweave in our earthly existence. “Yes,” says Luther, the enthusiastic panegyrist of music and of song, “music is one of the most beautiful and excellent of God’s gifts, by which many temptations and evil thoughts may be expelled. It dispels the spirit of melancholy, as we see in the case of Saul, and is a comforting

cordial, by which the heart is satisfied, refreshed, and revived. Music is a sort of half disciplinarian, which renders people more meek and gentle, decorous and rational." And in writing to an individual who suffered from attacks of melancholy, he says, "If you are cast down, and despondency comes over you, say to yourself, Awake, psaltery and harp! I must sing a hymn to the praise of my Lord Christ; be it a *TE DEUM LAUDAMUS*, *BENEDICTUS*, or whatever it may. For Scripture tells me that he gladly listens to the voice of rejoicing and melody. Then boldly strike the chords and sing, until the thoughts pass away, as David and Elisha did. If the devil returns and assaults you with new cares, give him immediately a blow on the mouth. Hasten again to your instrument, or send for cheerful companions, and sing till you learn to mock at him; for the devil is a sorrowful spirit, and makes people sad; hence he cannot bear music and song. But God is not a God of melancholy, but a God of consolation and joy."

It is well known, that music was frequently used by the prophets, and diligently practised in their schools. Thus, for instance, a number of the sons of the prophets met Saul at Gibeah, with psalteries and cymbals, pipes and harps, to the sound of which they sang inspired hymns. Music here took up its proper position. It was here a servant of the sanctuary; the love of God was its soul; its breath the Spirit of the Lord; the Lord's honour and glory its aim and subject. Thus, consecrated from on high, and elevating the mind on high, it spread peace and cheerfulness around, dispelled despondency and care, excited thoughts of eternity, and served to prepare the way for the operation of grace upon the soul. For we do not require to be told by the example of Saul, on whom the music of David's harp produced such wondrous effects, that grace

occasionally disguises its power in the melody of its sounds. It is not unfrequently the case, that we experience it ourselves, when sitting together, barren, fettered, and even desponding, and secretly angry and irritated. When some one then says, "Let us sing a verse," and the hymn harmoniously ascends, it immediately seems as if a softening and gently dissolving rain returned upon our souls. The uncomfortable feeling is fled. The inward garden revives, flourishes, and again sends forth its perfume, and the heart expands and grows warm.

Elisha was also acquainted with this power of music. His mind, thrown out of its wonted composure, and disturbed in its depths by its indignant feelings towards the miserable monarch, required soothing and recollection. The Holy Spirit (humanly speaking) could not properly express himself amid the tumult of inward agitation. The storm of holy indignation and fiery zeal, which drowned, as it were, the whisperings of the Spirit, must first be allayed. Elisha, from repeated experience, expected this soothing effect from music; he therefore desired a minstrel might be sent for. The harper appears, strikes his strings, and begins to play, and lo! the melodious chords produce their effect. The minds of the monarchs become more solemnized; their hearts are attuned to devotion. The tempest of excited feelings subsides in the soul of the prophet, and his mind is again able to soar aloft without restraint on the tender pinions of the pleasing harmony into Jehovah's blissful vicinity. His inmost spirit is become like a silent closet, in which even the most gentle communication of the Divine Spirit is understood; it is like the tranquil surface of a clear mountain lake, on which not a ripple is seen, and where the stars of heaven benignly reflect themselves. In this moment of renewed inward com-

posure and collectedness, Jehovah inclines himself to his seer with the voice of revelation. "The hand of the Lord came upon him," it is said, "when the minstrel played." The Lord begins to speak with his servant; his Spirit testifies to the spirit of the prophet what he has to announce and perform.

III.

The harp is silent. Elisha then opens his mouth to utter glad tidings. The Divine mercy is great. Israel shall both have water and overcome the rebels. "Thus saith the Lord," begins Elisha, "make this valley full of ditches. For ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts. And this is but a light thing in the sight of the Lord; he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand, and ye shall smite every fenced city, and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree, and stop all wells of water, and mar every good piece of land with stones." So speaks the prophet. Every distressed visage now looks cheerful. The prophetic advice is immediately followed and the trenches are made. But scarcely do they begin to dig, in the burning sand, when, wonderful to relate, the fresh springs of water bubble under the spades of the labourers. The languishing legions rush to them with shouts of joy and drink to their hearts' content. The army is saved from death, and renewed vigour pervades their withering and emaciated limbs.

Here, my friends, you have again the peculiar method, founded in profound wisdom, according to which the Lord is wont to act, when willing to manifest himself in aiding love. "For what purpose," might it be inquired, on reading our narrative, "the circuitous method, which the Lord

adopts for the deliverance of his people? Could he not have preserved them in a much more simple manner, by moderating somewhat of the sun's heat during the day, and thus have prevented the brooks and springs from drying up?" Certainly he might have done so; but Jehoram would then have honoured his golden calves as much as before, and Jehoshaphat would have had one less humbling proof of the faithfulness of his God, and the army would have thought, "We are the people! We cannot fail of success!" Thus, man would have been magnified, whilst Jehovah would have been rendered little and insignificant. But now, when deliverance came after every fleshly arm was broken, Jehovah was glorified in the sight of the people and his power and faithfulness triumphed. The apostates were now ashamed, the proud humbled, the believing strengthened, and the water spouted out as sweet again; for, with the water, the people enjoyed God and his goodness. O, observe, ye children of God, this mode in which your Father acts, and do not despond in your valleys and your deserts. If the day of prosperity occasionally sets, it is only to show you the star of love, and whenever the supports of human aid and your own wisdom break under your hands, it is only that Jehovah's power and faithfulness may erect their majestic throne upon the ruins.

But the help of God was not exhausted by thus quenching the thirst of the Israelites. A second wonder occurred the next morning. Before the people were aware, water came rushing down from the red mountainous ravines of Edom, which in a short time overflowed the sandy plain in which the Israelites were encamped. The Moabites, who had meanwhile received information of the march of the hostile legions, stood on their border ready for the attack. When the sun rose and threw its purple morning rays upon the

redish coloured waters, it seemed to the rebels that the water in the distance was blood, and they said to each other, by a Divine dispensation, "This is blood! The kings are surely slain, and they have smitten one another; now, therefore, Moab, to the spoil!" And scarcely had this delusive idea, like a deceitful *ignis fatuus*, arisen in their minds, than, overjoyed with the imaginary victory, they rush towards the camp of Israel. But who can describe their amazement, when the Israelitish squadrons, suddenly breaking forth from ambuscades and behind the tents, fall upon them with drawn swords. In a moment the rebels are put to the rout, and, throwing away their weapons, endeavour to make their escape. The allied armies pursue them, and carrying their victorious banners, in one continued assault, over the borders of Moab, totally defeat the rebels, whenever they fall in with them, demolish their fortified cities, and at the command of Jehovah, mar every field with stones, hew down the fruit trees, and press forward even as far as Kir-haraseth, the capital of the country, which they blockade, surround with engines of war, and threaten likewise to level with the ground.

The king of Moab, with the remains of his scattered army, had thrown himself into this place. But on seeing that he was not safe even there, because it was unable to sustain any long siege, he took the desperate resolution of fighting his way through. On that side of the city which was besieged by the king of Edom, he rushed out of the gates with seven hundred of his troops, but was immediately repulsed by the superiority of the enemy, and driven back behind the pallisades and fortifications. But O, the horrible scene that now occurs! The king, beside himself and confused by fear and apprehension, appears with his first-born son on the ramparts of the city. An altar is

erected, his son is slain, laid upon it, and offered to the gods, to propitiate them, and to induce them to help him. And when the Israelites saw it, it is said, "great indignation came upon them." A shuddering and sacred horror overpowered them. They could not bear the sight of this dreadful spectacle; at the same time they were deeply pained at having compelled the poor man to such an unexampled and desperate step. They suddenly became weary of fighting and destroying, raised the siege, marched away thoughtful and in silence, and permitted the unhappy king, with the inconsiderable remnant of his troops, to seek his safety in flight. The object of the campaign was attained. Moab's strength was broken, the rebellion quelled, and the country forced to return beneath the sceptre of the king of Israel.

The Lord is a man of war, great and mighty in battle. Happy are we if we are on his side, and he on ours. We then go forward from victory to victory. We dash warriors to pieces like earthen vessels. Our enemies shall be put to confusion, but we shall tread upon their high places.

God often lets his people reach the shore as on the planks of a shipwrecked vessel. He deprives us of the cisterns, in order to make us drink out of the fountains of waters. He frequently takes away our supports from us, not that we may fall to the ground, but that he may himself become our rod and our staff. The embarrassments of his people are only the festive scaffoldings on which his might, his faithfulness, and his mercy celebrate their triumphs.

A heathen sage said to one of his friends, "Do not complain of thy misfortunes as long as Cæsar is thy friend!"

What shall we say to those whom the prince of the kings of the earth calls his sons and his brethren? "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee!" Ought not these words to cast all fear and care for ever to the ground? He who possesses Him, to whom all things belong, possesses all things.

Affliction is a thorn, but still it is from God, by which he pierces through the leaves of pride. Many trees grow better in the shade than in the sunshine. O, if God is only with us! the furnace then is changed into a fire of joy, a prison into a pleasure-ground, an earthquake into a cheerful dance. Even the rod of his anger, like Aaron's rod, blossoms and bears almonds, like the staff of Jonathan, with honeycomb on its point.

A dreadful degree of the pride of natural men is manifested in the circumstance, that when all their own power and might is at an end, and when they can no longer deliver themselves, they give up all for lost, like the prince of Moab, and despair. They are, therefore, their own gods, and refuse to hear of any other, at least will not vouchsafe him a supplicating word. Insane haughtiness of the fallen and poverty-stricken children of Adam! Do you not feel how justly the despairing have their portion assigned them in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone?

God is the consolation of Israel. United with him it is superfluous to have anything of our own; and the poorer we then are in ourselves, the better. "When I am weak, then am I strong."

V.

THE MULTIPLYING OF THE OIL.

“THE hill of God is as the hill of Bashan,” sings David, in Psalm lxxviii. 15. He means the hill of Zion, the spiritual Zion. He justly represents the true church as a hill, or as a city upon a hill. As it respects their mode of thinking, their sentiments, their conduct and pursuits, they are in reality exalted far above the world, and its ordinary practice, and are speedily discovered wherever they may be, and even at a distance, although they are not unfrequently regarded with vexation and irritated looks. Their lofty position is indeed often assailed by storms, of which the race that dwell below are unconscious ; but then none of the latter can rejoice in such pleasing prospects, as present themselves in every direction and in ravishing beauty from the heights above.

In comparing mount Zion with the hill of Bashan, David intends especially to point out that fruitfulness which reigns in the Church of God ; for there spring up beneath the dew of heaven, such flowers and plants, as are otherwise not to be found upon earth. For where else blooms the rose of real love to God after the inner man ? Where else flourishes the sunflower of genuine, childlike, and believing prayer ? Where else the lilly of an undissembled longing after heaven, and the floweret of humility, and that of childlike simplicity, and that of patience ? Where else shall we meet, in the wide garden of mankind, with flowers like these, which have originally sprung from paradise ?

and how many other things beside grow upon the heights of Zion? There medicinal herbs against every disease perfume the air. There grows the balm of Gilead which brings eternal health. There flourish shrubs of life, which yield a never-fading vitality; nor is the plant wanting there, which is an antidote to death. Envidable people, who have obtained an inheritance upon such a soil!

"Yes," say you, "But do no other than spiritual productions grow there?" I answer, there is no want of earthly things there, if such be your chief concern. On mount Zion grows also flax for linen, wool for clothes, and bread in abundance; and, what is the best of all, sterility and famine never occur there. Even though the rest of the world should starve, the field of the Zionites is always fruitful. "What! always?" Both in summer and winter, and no hail-storm or heavy shower can destroy it. For their field is—God. "God their field?" Assuredly, their field, their magazine, their treasury, and who can say what besides? Respecting this you would probably be glad to convince yourselves a little more fully. The narrative we are about to consider, will afford you an opportunity of doing so.

2 KINGS iv. 1—7.

"Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen.

"And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for thee? tell me: what hast thou in the house? And she said, Thine hand-maid hath not anything in the house save a pot of oil.

"Then he said, Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels; borrow not a few.

“And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee, and thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full.

“So she went from him, and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought the vessels to her, and she poured out.

“And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel more. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stayed.

“Then she came and told the man of God: and he said Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest.”

The war against Moab is ended. The rebels are laid in the dust by the hand of the Almighty. Elisha has left the army, and again goes about, helping and healing, amongst the poor and needy of his people. The event which we have this day before us, affords an additional proof of that which we lately said of Elisha's peculiar character and vocation, as a messenger of the loving-kindness and favour of Jehovah. It is a pleasing and affecting history, greatly calculated to strengthen our faith. Let us contemplate it a little more closely, and consider, the distress of the poor widow, her recourse to the prophet, and her deliverance.

I.

The place where the event occurred which is recorded in our text, is not mentioned. Perhaps it was Gilgal, where at that time there was a prophets' school, as well as at Jericho and Beth-el. We know what kind of schools these were, since the history of Elijah afforded us frequent opportunity of becoming more closely acquainted with their constitution and their object. In the days of Samuel, the founder of these schools, we first meet with these lovely in-

stitutions in Israel. They were voluntary associations of youths and men, who dwelt in these places, either socially under one roof, or in separate cottages, on a confidential footing, and maintained themselves by the labour of their hands, either behind the plough, or in the vineyards and olive-grounds ; but besides this, occupied themselves also with higher things, and devoted themselves especially to the study of the sacred Scriptures, Divine revelations, music, and other arts and sciences which had reference to Divine things. A prophet was always the teacher and paternal guide of these sacred associations, who, if the Lord did not require him elsewhere, resided, first at one place and then at another in rotation, and visited their cottages as a welcome guest, with words of wisdom, or collected the brethren around him, in blissful and tranquil seasons, to guide them into the depths of Divine truth and wisdom, or to pray with them, and to join them in singing joyful hymns of praise to the Lord. These free schools of devout and enlightened men, which bore, perhaps, some resemblance to the missionary seminaries of the present day, formed the flower of Israel, and were, from Samuel's time downwards, the living hearth on which the fire of Jehovah burned the brightest and the most purely. That which Israel was to the world, these schools were to Israel—the receptacles of the true light. It was even frequently the case, that what still remained of Divine and spiritual life in Israel was concentrated to these schools, and emanated from thence, as from the heart and centre, into the veins and limbs of an inanimate people. These associations were living and Divine fountains in the desert, fructifying springs of water for the whole country, blooming nurseries of the kingdom of God, and Israel's germ, salt, and fairest crown. Hence it was also from them that the Lord called

forth the most of his seers and prophets, and selected the individuals who advocated his cause amongst the people.

Many of these pious and enlightened men, whom the Scriptures are wont to designate by the title of sons of the prophets, had wives and children; and thus we know what kind of a woman it was, that meets us in the narrative under consideration, and who is called in our text "a woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets." We enter in spirit into a mean-looking cottage. The naked walls, the barely furnished shelves, the poor little table with the wooden bench before it, and the bed of straw, yonder, in the unfurnished chamber, already tells us clearly enough to what region of human life its occupants belong. But this is still more clearly evident in the pallid and care-worn visage of the poorly dressed woman, who comes to meet us, with her eyes red with weeping, and whose features remind us of a nightly landscape, the obscurity of which is, however, gently illumined by the mild radiance of the stars. She is a daughter of Abraham, and that not merely according to the flesh; she knows the Lord, and belongs to him. He loves her, he carries her in his bosom, and has in reserve for her in heaven, a palace, a crown of righteousness, white raiment, and who can tell what besides? The dear woman has heard a little of this; and it is the only stay she has left, the only propitious star, which still shines in her darkness. Without this consciousness, which bears her up, she would have perished in her misery; the fatal pit of despair would have swallowed her up. Severe and overwhelming sufferings had befallen her, the bitterest and most painful which can befall a human being upon earth. Her husband, the crown of her house, has long slept beneath the grassy hillock; an early death has unmercifully taken him away. No one, and nothing in

the world, is able to fill up this aching void. His grave is ever wet with her tears. She goes mourning all her days, and the wound which this loss has inflicted upon her faithful and affectionate heart, can never be healed. But this sorrow for her departed husband was not the bitterest pang which rent her heart. There was always something sweet and beneficial in the profound grief in which she spent her days and nights, at the recollection of her irreparable loss. The lively remembrance of his beloved image, which continually hovered before her eyes in the radiance of transfiguration; the recollection of his love and faithfulness; the retrospect of that sacred and never-to-be-forgotten hour of his resigned and triumphant departure; and more especially the certain, and heart-enchancing prospect of again seeing him in a short time there, where the Almighty himself, with his paternal hand, shall for ever wipe away the last tear of sorrow from the weeping eyes of his children, and where there shall be no more crying nor suffering, nor death—no more parting nor separation. All this spread a soft and lovely moon-light over the gloomy night of her deeply-troubled soul, and alleviated and transfigured in its beams the poignancy of her sorrowing affection. Besides, this stroke had proceeded immediately from the hand of the Lord, and such-like strokes, however painful they may be, are never the bitterest, especially when the heart knows the name Abba, and believes the saying, “Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth.” O then we may certainly say with David: “I will rather fall into the hands of God, than into the hands of man.” In every case there is an advantage in it; for “great is his mercy,” says David. Mankind, on the contrary—on this point David has his own thoughts, and does not express them. But our widow experiences what it is to fall into the hands of the unmerci-

ful sons of the dust, and this experience becomes the bitterest and harshest drop in the cup of her suffering.

Her husband, on his dying bed, had only been able to commend her to the parental protection of the Almighty. He left her in the deepest poverty, in the little hut which had been probably already mortgaged; and not only so, but on parting, he was obliged to leave a burden upon her, which, on account of the painful and almost insuperable care which accompanied it, and because in consequence of it, she was given up to the power, the mercilessness, and hard-heartedness of men, might with good reason be reckoned the most painful and oppressive of all temporal burdens. He left debts behind him, and neither the means nor the prospect of paying them. Who can say, how these debts had arisen? Thoughtlessness had certainly no part in them. It is interesting to hear what an ancient Hebrew tradition relates respecting this circumstance, although we cannot rely with full confidence upon its information. According to this ancient legend, we have before us in the poor widow, a person who was born and brought up under very different circumstances, and who had been accustomed to a very different life to that in which we at present meet with her. In her we behold, according to that tradition, a woman of a respectable family and high rank, whose husband was called Obadiah, and who was no other, than the pious and devout statesman of that name, at the court of king Ahab, with whom we became acquainted in the history of Elijah, and who, in the murderous persecution, which, at Jezebel's instigation, at that time beset the believing in Israel, hid a hundred of the sons of the prophets in remote caverns, and provided them with bread and water. Jezebel is said to have subsequently been informed of the circumstance and to have brought about Obadiah's

removal, on account of his faith. Obadiah, as the tradition relates, then took up his abode, with wife and child, in the midst of the schools of the prophets, in order to support himself by the labour of his hands, and to live entirely to the Lord and his cause ; the debt which he left behind him, proceeded from the expense of supporting the hundred brethren ; he had hoped gradually to liquidate it from his income ; but he was then dismissed from his office, and in the impoverished circumstances in which he was subsequently placed, he was able only to pay off a part of it.

Such is the ancient legend, which is certainly worthy of being listened to. But be it as it may ; the poor widow is now in the utmost perplexity, and oppressed by a cruel creditor. She has already stripped her house of every thing but that which is indispensable, in order to satisfy him, and the sons of the prophets, poor themselves, have contributed according to their ability. But even this is insufficient. The sum must be made up, and that too on a particular day ; which if not done, the cruel man sends her word he is fully resolved to take her two sons, and let them serve amongst his domestics, for seven years together, behind the horses and the ploughs ; and according to Israelitish laws, the creditor could really have carried his merciless purpose into effect. Imagine to yourselves, what must have been the feelings of the poor mother on receiving this norrifying intelligence. Her two sons, the whole of what was now left her, and who, next to God, were her sole support, her sole consolation, her only hope—to see even these in a short time torn from her side, in such an extremely lamentable manner ! Ah how many a night may she have bathed her wretched pallet with her tears, after this dreadful menace had been communicated to her ! Truly, her situation was enough to make her despair ; she

must have perished in her misery, if the word of the Lord had not been her consolation and the looking up to him her light in this darkness.

But was she not nevertheless beloved of God? Doubtless she was. Yet he can occasionally form the greatness of his love, embrace his children with his arms, and press them so closely to his heart, that their eyes overflow with tears. How strange, forsaken, and destitute may the life of a child of God occasionally appear! But what does it matter? In this wilderness walks one, to whom it is easy to cause the rocks to flow, and grapes to grow upon thorns. However, for such wonders there is room only in the desert. If occasionally the saints of the Lord are in straits and difficulties in this world, it must be regarded in no other light than as if an individual were led with his eyes bound up a steep hill, in order that on arriving at its summit, the prospect may the more surprise and delight him; or as when the sun goes down, not that darkness may succeed, but that the starry heavens may unveil themselves in all their splendour; or as when a shepherd, in order to cleanse his helpless sheep from dust, casts it without ceremony into the water. "I am with thee," says the shepherd to himself, "thou shalt sustain no injury." Why bleat ye then ye sheep? only let him act with you as he pleases.

II.

The day when the dreadful sentence is to be executed upon the poor widow, is at the door. Who can describe the agony and grief of the helpless woman? Doubtless there had been no want of intercessions for her on the part of the sons of the prophets; but the tyrannical heart of her creditor, far from being softened by such interference,

had only become the more obstinate and implacable, for he hated the people of the Lord, and was an enemy to the quiet in the land. The oppressed woman thus saw herself cast alone upon Him, who calls himself a judge of the widow, and the father of the fatherless. She draws near to God with her torn and sorrowful heart. She has recourse to him with a thousand sighs and tears.

You know that, generally speaking, the saints in the times of the law, did not understand how to approach the throne of grace with the same boldness, as the children of the new covenant. The way to the holy place, says Paul, was not yet revealed, the veil not yet drawn aside. We have scarcely an idea, through what clouds those saints, in the feeling of their unworthiness, had to penetrate with their prayers, especially when these prayers had reference to temporal and personal blessings. O, when that throne, whose habitation is justice and judgment, revealed itself to their inward eye, and the fiery radiance of the Divine holiness flashed upon them; when that majesty presented itself to the view of their spirits, before which even angels tremble and cover their faces with their wings; and when in the light of the infinite purity of the Most High, the deformity and pollution of their own lives presented itself doubly hateful and abominable to their consciousness—how hazardous it appeared to them, and they, who were only contemptible dust, should dare to enter into the infinite radiance of the resplendent presence-chamber, and importune the Most High with their despicable matters! How much conflict and labour it required, before the trembling sigh, which, so to speak, at its first ascent, singed its pinions at the lightnings of the majesty on high, could press through, even only to the threshold, and the lowest steps of the sanctuary!

To us, my friends, it is an easy matter to pray to our incarnate God. We can say, what no Israelite was able to do, "Lord, thou knowest from thy own experience, how a poor child of Adam feels in any particular situation." We can exclaim, "Abba, Father, hear us for the sake of Jesus, thy beloved Son, and our brother!" We behold this Son, standing as our intercessor before the Father, and are conscious, that in him, notwithstanding our thousand-fold infirmities, we are blameless and acceptable in his sight, as our Surety himself. And how easy and confidentially does prayer ascend on high on the wings of such ideas! How rapidly we fly through the clouds in the wondrous vessel of this confidence! Prayer is then no longer a labour, it is as joyful and as easy an occupation as drawing our breath. Pinions of confidence and joy bear it aloft. The prayers of the ancients, on the contrary, were mostly a struggling as with a thousand obstacles; a wearisome voyage, not under swelling sails, but against baffling winds, and amid roaring breakers. For how dark and deeply veiled from their view, between the mists of a distant futurity, was the great work of the Divine atonement, and how much they lost by not having been favoured with the sight of God manifest in the flesh? It becomes very explicable to us, why we see the pious in Old Testament times, having recourse so frequently, in their difficulties and distresses, to the prophets, instead of immediately repairing to Jehovah's throne, and making use of them as agents between them and the Almighty. It was believed that these holy individuals might sooner venture before the throne of the heavenly Majesty; since, as belonging to the court of the King of kings, they were better acquainted with the proprieties of that exalted habitation, and probably found an easier entrance and audience from the Lord of

all worlds, than such wretched and miserable creatures as they were. Their intercessions were consequently employed, and hence the prophets were to the people as living types, and even as vicars of the great Intercessor, who was not yet come. We see our poor oppressed widow likewise hastening to Elisha, as to one, who stood nearer the Lord than she, and who, as the vehicle of Divine gifts and power, would probably be able to help and counsel her. She comes to him, crying aloud, and with many tears. "Alas!" says she, "thy servant, my husband, is dead, and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord; and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen!"

Thus spoke the poor woman, whose tears prevented her from saying any more. She does not fully express all that preyed upon her mind, but it is sufficiently evident in her supplicating expression of countenance on which the faint light of a glimmering hope, still trembles. Doubtless she was acquainted with the miraculous affair which once occurred in the house of the widow of Zarephath; and such facts are able wonderfully to support and sustain the individual's sinking courage and faith, and pleasingly to cool the heated forehead in the days of distress and oppression. "If that widow was assisted," thinks the sobbing suppliant, "why should I be forsaken? I am also a poor and needy woman; and Elisha will be able to accomplish no less in the strength of Jehovah, than he whose mantle envelops him!"

III.

Elisha, most deeply affected by the situation of this afflicted widow, and weeping with those that weep in his acutely susceptible mind, receives within him the Divine

commission to dry the poor woman's tearful eyes, and to make an end of her distress by a miracle. He looks at the sobbing mother with a kind and benevolent countenance, and says to her, by the impulse of the Holy Spirit, "What shall I do for thee? Tell me what hast thou in the house?" "Ah," replied the poor woman, "thine handmaid hath not anything in the house, save a pot of oil; everything else is already in the hands of the creditor." "Go now," said Elisha, "and borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels; borrow not a few. Then retire into thy chamber, and take thy two sons with thee. And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee, and pour out into all those vessels, and when one is full set it aside, and take another." Thus spoke the prophet. The eyes of the distressed widow shine, like those of him, who having lost himself in some subterranean mine, and after long and hopelessly wandering about in the dark labyrinth, at length beholds at a distance the bright beam of day shining into the sepulchral darkness, and joyfully exclaims, "Thank God, yonder is the outlet!" She already anticipates with joyful emotion what will occur. Perhaps she might, in her amazement, have regarded it as impossible that she could be relieved in such a manner, had not the well-known miracle at Zarephath presented itself to her mind. But now she does not hesitate, but believes, that a similar thing will occur to her. Such is the utility of ancient narratives of Divine assistance; and it is the intention of God that this should be the benefit, which believers ought to derive from them to this hour. It is for this object they are recorded.

The widow hastens home with rapid steps, in order to fulfil without delay, the injunctions of the prophet. She goes, as he had directed her, to her neighbours; collects a

large number of vessels of every kind together, carries them into the chamber, shuts herself in with the two favourites of her heart, and then—O what a sacred and solemn moment it must have been!—she takes her pitcher in God's name, draws from the tap at the bottom of it,—for thus were the oil-vessels of the eastern countries formed,—and the golden oil begins to flow. O how wonderful! the first vessel, which is perhaps ten times the size of the little pitcher, is already filled by it; another is placed in its stead, and is filled; a third, and it is filled; and thus it continues. When the sons place a vessel beneath the vent, they are obliged immediately to have another at hand. There is no end to the flowing; and it is just as if a fountain of oil were bubbling up in the pitcher. All the vessels are filled, and the last of them is just standing under the pitcher. The oil approaches the brim, when the mother calls out, "Bring me yet a vessel!" "There is not a vessel more," answered the sons. "Then," as the history relates, "the oil stayed;" it ceased to flow.

Beside herself with astonishment, thankfulness, and joy, the widow sets down her full vessel, hastens back to the man of God, and relates to him, almost breathless and with inward exultation, what great and glorious things she had experienced. But Elisha says, "Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children upon the rest." O happy woman! How gloriously was the oppressive burden at once removed from her. She was delivered out of the hands of the cruel oppressor, and her sons—these only supports of her age—were left her. O how had the gloomy sky of her life again become bright and cheerful—how pleasing and promising were now her future prospects! She felt like one who dreams a delightful dream. But that help and deliverance should come so unexpectedly,

and just in this manner, and so directly from God, was that which gilded the miracle with transcendant lustre. By this it evidenced itself, also as an unambiguous declaration of the kindness and love of God, and as a pledge of his paternal providence and protection; and by it the words were addressed to her, "Fear not, for I, the advocate of the widow and the father of the orphan, am and will be with thee!"

You have here an instance, my friends, how the Lord can deliver and preserve his elect, and how he has counsel in abundance for them, when every human prospect is closed against them, and the fountains of this world's aid are dried up around them. "But," you reply, "he does not deliver his people any longer in this manner; nor is he any longer wont to pay his people's debts in such a way." But are you so very sure and certain of this? And supposing he did but rarely help in the present day, in such a striking and wonderful manner, yet is the miracle of his aid the less, because he makes use of human instruments, and communicates his blessings by charitable hands? Listen to a narrative, my brethren; the tale is true.

One Christmas eve, during a period of tribulation and affliction, a poor widow lay sick and weak upon her bed. The windows glittered in the adjoining houses with festive light, and her neighbour's children were rejoicing and exulting in their numerous presents. Meanwhile the poor forsaken woman continued lying disconsolate and weeping on her bed, her heart filled with sorrow and care. Her little ones stood silently and mournfully around her. Not a morsel of bread was left in the house, nor a penny in the cupboard to procure any. "Alas, dear Lord," thought the poor woman, "how art thou guiding me!" and a profound and painful sigh escaped from her heavily oppressed

heart. Suddenly, it was inwardly whispered to her, "What hast thou in thy house?" "Ah," sighed she to herself, "what have I? a few empty plates, and that is all!" "Place them upon the table," it was said to her further, "and borrow empty vessels from thy neighbours, and not a few." Observe, my dear friends, these were the precise words which were whispered to her; not a word more or less. The widow sighed. "What is the meaning of it?" thinks she, and says, "Dear Lord, see, here are my children, in them thou hast empty vessels; they have neither anything to eat, nor clothes to put on!" "*Believe!*" was the reply, the same moment, the door opens, and a person enters, who, after a friendly salutation, lays a sum of money on the table, and immediately hastens away again. Directly afterwards come others, who bring bread in a variety of forms, and others again bring meat and provisions of various descriptions. The plates are already full, but still there is no end to the bringing. The children are obliged to borrow vessels of their neighbours, and not a few of them, and not one of them is left unfilled, and linen is brought in, and clothes for the little ones, and even playthings for them as Christmas gifts; and still more than all this, nothing but friendly faces appear, and many refreshing expressions of affection, and all kinds of comforting, sweet, and encouraging things are spoken. All this occurred in rapid succession, in the space of a few minutes, and it was as if the people had concerted together, and yet no one knew of the other's intention. And when all was quiet again, and the gifts were lying on the table, which they covered from one end to the other—it seemed at first, to the astonished widow, as if only some sweet dream were playing with her soul. But then all that was within her exclaimed, "Surely the Lord was in this place,"

and her heart melted with thankfulness and emotion. At this moment it occurred to her, that her late husband had said to her on his death-bed, with his last breath, "Do not weep ; only be calm ; the Lord will be with thee, and will not forsake thee !" "Ah," thinks she, "I see now ; the Lord spoke it through his mouth." And whilst thinking thus, a more joyful confidence is infused into her heart than she had previously felt, "that her husband belonged to the Lord, and that she would infallibly meet him again in heaven." It now seemed to her, as if on a sudden she possessed her departed companion again, and from that evening, a new and heavenly bond connected her with his happy spirit. The sick woman now lay under the influence of the most joyful emotions, whilst her children with glistening eyes, skipped around the table, and contemplated the gifts. Their mother then thought—"Ah, gracious Lord, if thy loving kindness is so great, thou couldst likewise restore me to health !" And scarcely had the prayer ascended within her, than she felt more cheerful, strong, and healthy, than had been the case for many years. She springs up from her couch, praises the Lord with her little ones, is able to attend church the following day, and again the day after ; and if she is ever weak at present, she knows since that time, that it is an easy thing for the Lord, and costs only a word, to make in a moment, whenever it pleases him, an end to all her distresses. Such is my tale.

Tell me now, does the Lord appear less in this instance, than in the event recorded in our text ; and was this aid less wonderful and glorious than the latter ? And when and where did this incident happen ? It is a circumstance of very recent occurrence, and it happened in our own valley, and in the centre of our own parish. It took place on the eve of the last Christmas festival, literally as I have

related it to you. Hitherto it has only been known to the woman and myself. Now you all know it. But you must not enquire further after the widow's name. Of what importance is it to you, who she is? Plant the fact itself in the garden of your recollection. You may also experience days and hours, in which the invigorating scent of this remarkable incident, may pleasingly refresh you.

Brethren, I know of a large and wonderful house, which is situate beyond the clouds. The stars above form the glittering lamps which twinkle towards us from the windows of that edifice. The road to it is more numerously trodden than any other in the world. Even the lark ascends that path, and every good and perfect gift in the world, has descended to us by this road, and from that habitation. You already perceive of what mansion I am speaking. Yes, if the sluices there are closed our fields and meadows languish, and our ploughing and sowing are in vain. If payment is once stopped there, the whole world becomes bankrupt. If a blessing is not pronounced there upon our labours, we starve in spite of all the sweat of our brow; or else we eat, as Haggai says, and have not enough; we clothe ourselves, but there is none warm; and what we earn, is put into a bag with holes.

There dwells in this house, a great and rich Lord; "The eyes of all wait upon him, and he giveth them their meat in due season." He has a superabundance of everything, and if he wished to distribute anything, which he did not possess, he need only speak and there it would be. He sits there in majestic glory. All the powers of heaven and earth are in his hand. He governs the world, and all that is in it. Not a sparrow falls from the roof without his will, nor a hair from thy head without his knowledge and permission. He leads forth the sun like a bridegroom out

of his chamber : he points out to the stars their courses, and calls them all by their names : he clothes the lilies more sumptuously than Solomon in his regal splendour. It is he who feeds the young ravens, who loads the branches of the trees with golden fruit, and who speaks kindly to the weary soul. He needs not that anything should be given him, in order to give again. He had bread in the desert for his people, without baking-ovens ; water for Israel, without wells and cisterns ; meal and oil for the poor widow of Zarephath, without mills and presses ; and food and attendance on the hermit, by the brook Cherith, without human hands ; yea, he always knows a way, nor is he in want of means. Every word which he utters in blessing, is a cornucopia overflowing with benefits. It is in vain for a man to rise early, and sit up late, and eat the bread of sorrows. He gives it to his friends whilst they sleep. Now observe, it is to this rich, this all-possessing, omnipotent God, that we are referred with our necessities, and he is inclined towards us in Christ. We may even bring our empty bread-baskets to his threshold. Ah, if many amongst us had taken this path, they would not have become beggars, nor perished in want and distress, and there would be infinitely less misery in the world.

“ But the house is so far off ! ” O, not so far as many may suppose. “ But the Lord, who resides in it, is so great.” He is great ; but on this account nothing is too small for him. “ But the Lord of that place is so holy ! ” Yes, holy in a terrific degree ; but, nevertheless, a path is opened for sinners to his lofty habitation, and a way to his heart. The way is Christ. He that understands how to travel upon this road with the wagon of his necessities will never return empty and without back-freight. Know, that in Christ, thy petitions are no longer the petitions of a

transgressor, but of a righteous person. In Christ, a reprobate does not enter the paternal mansion, but a beloved child. In Christ, not a condemned criminal approaches, but one who is entitled to life. In Christ, it is not even a poor beggar that comes, but an heir of all things. If there were no Christ, thou mightest well say, "The way to the palace above is so long." There would then be no road thither. A horrible gulph would then lie between; and though thou bore all the virtues of the world concentrated in thee alone, they would not suffice to form a bridge over the abyss, nor couldst thou make of them a vessel to carry thee across. But now that thou mayest have Christ and his merits, *thou* needest no longer to think of forming a way or building a bridge. Therefore only take heed to become entirely Christ's and thou wilt then regard the Lord in heaven no longer as a distant God, but as one who is unspeakably near. Thou wilt no longer see in him a consuming fire, but a tender father. Thy wishes will not then shrink back at his presence, they will fall into his arms, with a confidential, "Abba, Father." Thou wilt then no longer feel any scruple about going to him with thy empty basket. Thou wilt go, because it is an understood thing that thou mayest, and wilt receive. Thy prayerful thoughts will then soar aloft with joyful pinions. If thou art in want of anything, thou wilt immediately hasten to his threshold. Thus thou hast found the way to the rich house above the clouds, and He who inhabits it will also be able to find his way to thee with his blessing.

And when thou standest before his gate, knock loudly and boldly, not as a beggar knocks, but as one who belongs to the house; not as a vagabond, who is afraid of the police, but as a friend and an intimate acquaintance; not as one who is apprehensive of being troublesome, or of coming at

an improper time, but as a guest, who may rest assured of a hearty welcome. And if the door is not immediately opened, take the staff of the promises, and make a noise with it at his palace gate. Say, "Lord, thou hast said, Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you; I entreat thee for this addition." Say, "Lord, here is one, who is much more than the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, and shall he hunger and remain unclothed?" Say, "Father, it is not a raven that cries for bread, but a member of thy dear Son!" Say, "Thou hast said unto us, Cast all your care upon me, for I care for you! Care, therefore, O Father!" With this staff of the promises, make a tumult at his gate, and help and deliverance will soon be granted thee. He will assuredly give thee, and if he did not do it from love, he would do it as the friend mentioned in the Gospel, because of thy shameless importunity.

Be of good cheer, therefore, my brethren in the Lord, happy are ye! You never can nor ever shall want any good thing. No, "Goodness and mercy shall follow you all the days of your life." The whole treasury of heaven stands open to you in Christ. All is yours; all, all. Therefore, rejoice evermore, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your hearts. Amen.

VI.

THE SHUNAMMITE.

It is really so, my friends; the way to life is a path of affliction, a thorny road. The Scriptures by no means conceal this from us. The Saviour himself said to one who was eager to follow him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." And what is Paul's inscription on the standard of Israel? "It is through much tribulation that we must enter the kingdom of God." Let no one, however, be deterred by this from joining us on our march. It is nevertheless a glorious, wonderful, and blissful road which leads to Jerusalem, except that what the prophet says has also reference to it: "upon all the glory there shall be a covering." (Luther's version.) When the covering is at length removed, we shall experience a joyful surprise.

The path of a child of God is glorious, even from his cradle. Certainly, when first it sees the light, there is apparently nothing very particular in the babe; a naked worm lies before us, which has been conceived in sin, a child as other children are. But we lift the veil, and behold what? an Esau? No, a Jacob. A Cain? No, an Abel, a Jeditjah. Smiling angels stand around the young stranger, and a voice whispers at his cradle, the same which was heard at Solomon's, saying, "I have loved thee!" And if we listen more attentively, it is added, "with an everlasting love;" and a blessing is pronounced upon the child, a

blessing which extends itself even into eternity. The little babe is brought to the baptismal font, and there also nothing more is done to it than to other Christian children. But we take away the covering, and behold the Lord Jesus himself baptizing the child; his baptism is a real pledge and seal. All the blessings and privileges of the new covenant are solemnly promised to the new-born babe, without any provision or conditions. Its name is written in indelible characters in the heavenly book, and its blessed mother rocks the son of a king, a joint heir with Christ, upon her arm. When the highly-favoured infant grows up, there is again nothing discoverable of what is uncommon in its exterior. It acts as other children do. But looking at it with a spiritual eye, what dost thou perceive? a wondrous plan of heavenly wisdom and love overruling the life of the child, and a tender, divine, and parental hand manifested in all its training and guidance. Every thing is so regulated in the existence of the individual, as shall best promote his salvation. Every thing occurs just as it ought to occur; and this afterwards becomes sufficiently apparent. Even as the Lord said unto Moses, "When I take away my hand, thou shalt see my back-parts."

The blessed citizen of the heavenly kingdom does not yet bear the signature of his high rank upon his forehead. He still belongs to the sheep which are not of the good Shepherd's fold, but must first be brought into it. The hour arrives when he wakes to newness of life. What dost thou now see? Anything particular? By no means. Thou seest a weeping individual, a sighing creature, one that languishes after grace and mercy. But remove the veil. What is now revealed? The Holy Spirit is seen personally taking up his abode in the dark world of the poor sinner's heart, selecting the sphere of his operations, calling a new

life and being into existence; and the angels of God are seen tuning their harps, and there is joy in heaven over the penitent, and a garden of God springs up in his soul. The man now walks the narrow path, and again he seems to be walking only like a thousand others, except that his road appears more solitary and gloomy—nay, often like the path of one that is forsaken and proscribed. But I remove the nightly envelopment, and consider with the eye of faith, the mean-looking pilgrim and his path. What wonders, what glories present themselves to my view! I find the solitary pilgrim in the most delightful society. About him, wherever he goes, the keeper of Israel, who neither slumbers nor sleeps. Above him, like an inextinguishable star, the paternal eye of Deity, full of tenderness and faithfulness. Beneath him, eagles' wings and angels' hands, bearing up through life the apparently tottering mortal, lest he dash his foot against a stone. I do not see him take a single step in his wanderings, without being drawn by the cords of eternal love. If this leads him through the waters, Jesus is the pilot of his vessel, and the dove sits on the mast with the olivebranch of comfort. If his path conducts him through the fires, the spectacle of the burning fiery furnace is only again renewed; the flames do not kindle upon him, for God is with him. If he falls into distress and embarrassment, a host of angels immediately stand before the face of the Eternal, and inquire, saying, "Father, in what way shall he be delivered?" If he slumbers, wings of mercy gently overshadow him. If he wakes, many gracious eyes wake with him. If he weeps, his tears are numbered in heaven, and are collected into an urn. If he prays, his ejaculations soar through the clouds; and how welcome are they in the courts above, how gladly seen! If he fights, not only do invisible hands

wipe the perspiration from his forehead in the conflict, but likewise strive for him, that he may be able to keep the field. And when at length he dies, nothing, according to human appearance, happens to him differing from that which befalls others. A dark cloud envelops his departing hour. He lies struggling with death on his solitary couch. But we draw aside the veil, and what a scene presents itself to our view! A brilliant circle of heavenly guests surround the dying bed, and He himself with a friendly hand assumes the office of the angel of death, who once said with a consoling voice to his disciples, "And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to myself, that where I am, ye may be also."

Such, my friends, is *something* of the hidden glory of the narrow way; but only something. Who is able to declare all its wonders! Whatever there may be to renounce, to suffer, and to mortify upon this path, it holds no comparison with the thousand-fold incomparable recompence, which is here offered to you in its place. This way, with all its inconveniences, is notwithstanding a gracious way, a way of peace. Though storms may overtake us upon it, what need we care? It is provided in every direction with accessible resting-places and pleasant retreats. If the view of thy sins renders thee anxious, flee with thy soul into the wounds of thy Surety. Who will there condemn thee? If cares approach thee, the bright and cheerful mansions of the Divine promises open themselves to thee in every direction, in order to receive thee into their spacious and festive saloons. If thy spring of susceptibility, power, and unction dries up, let thine eye feast itself upon the wondrous robe of salvation, wrought by thy Surety and vicarious Sacrifice, which is thine, and shall never be taken from thee. If it grows dark about thee, here below, and

solitary, and sorrowful, ascend the fiery chariot of hope, and soar aloft in spirit to brighter and more blissful shores. And what shall I say further of the loveliness of this path, of the joys, the intercourse with the Saviour, the sweetness, the fellowship of the saints, which it daily presents to us? O join yourselves to us, and experience yourselves in what a rich measure we are rewarded, even here below, for having chosen that path, of which Solomon says, "The way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath."

How wonderful is this way, frequently, and yet again how lovely, will be seen from the narrative, which lies before us for our consideration this day : may it most abundantly refresh us, and attune the strings of our hearts to the song of the Psalmist :

Happy the man, whose hopes rely
On Israel's God, he made the sky,
And earth, and seas with all their train ;
And none shall find his promise vain.

2 KINGS iv. 8—37.

"And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman ; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that, as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread.

"And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually.

"Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall ; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick : and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither.

"And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber and lay there.

"And he said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him.

"And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast

been careful for us with all this care ; what is to be done for thee ? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host ? And she answered, I dwell among mine own people.

“ And he said, What then is to be done for her ? And Gehazi answered, Verily, she hath no child, and her husband is old.

“ And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door.

“ And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid.

“ And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life.

“ And when the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers.

“ And he said unto his father, My head, my head. And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother.

“ And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died.

“ And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out.

“ And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again.

“ And he said, Wherefore wilt thou go to him to-day ? it is neither new moon, nor Sabbath. And she said, It shall be well.

“ Then she saddled an ass, and said to her servant, Drive, and go forward ; slack not thy riding for me, except I bid thee.

“ So she went, and came unto the man of God to mount Carmel. And it came to pass, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi his servant, Behold, yonder is that Shunammite.

“ Run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, Is it well with thee ? is it well with thy husband ? is it well with the child ? And she answered, It is well.

“ And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the feet : but Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said, Let her alone ; for her soul is vexed within her : and the Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me.

"Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord ? did I not say, Do not deceive me ?

"Then he said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way : if thou meet any man, salute him not ; and if any salute thee, answer him not again : and lay my staff upon the face of the child.

"And the mother of the child said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose and followed her.

"And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the child ; but there was neither voice nor hearing. Wherefore he went again to meet him, and told him, saying, The child is not awaked.

"And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed.

"He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the Lord.

"And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands : and he stretched himself upon the child ; and the flesh of the child waxed warm.

"Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro ; and went up, and stretched himself upon him : and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes.

"And he called Gehazi, and said Call the Shunammite. So he called her. And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son.

"Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son and went out."

I am not ignorant, my friends, that you are not fond of hearing very long texts. The case is no less so with me, and we also know for what reason. I therefore thought at first of dividing our present narrative into several texts ; but found on closer consideration, that such a separation would be entirely out of its place. The history forms too much a closely connected whole, to be rent asunder with

propriety. Besides this, it lies too simply, intelligibly, and openly before us, in all its parts and features, to oblige us either to expatiate upon it at any great length, or to introduce anything of an artificial or irrelevant nature into it, if we were desirous of making it the subject of several meditations. In fact, it requires little else, than that I once more place the narrative before you in an obvious manner, and the Divine and general sense which it conveys, will become of itself apparent to you. However, I purpose doing something more than this; I will particularize the edifying substance of each individual scene, and press out into your cup the grapes of this lovely vine, in order, by God's grace, to present unto many of you another refreshing draught, to revive their drooping faith. There are five ideas to which I think of directing your attention; and these are, **THE LODGING AT SHUNEM**; **THE GRATEFUL GUEST**; **THE DYING CHILD**; **GEHAZI WITH ELISHA'S STAFF**; and **THE RESTORATION TO LIFE**.

I.

Near the centre of the promised land, a few days' journey upwards from Jerusalem, a plain stretches itself from the sea-coast to the vine-crowned banks of the Jordan. It is extensive, interrupted only by single eminences, and partially intersected by the little river Kishon; and is a district, which, as regards fecundity of soil, luxuriance of vegetation, and agreeableness of climate, has scarcely its equal on the face of the earth. Here, in the pleasing vicinity of evergreen olive woods, and waving cornfields, a quiet, pleasant, and prosperous little town was situate in ancient times, the name of which was Shunem. It is there that we will now take up our abode for a short time, for those remarkable things happen there, of which we are to be witnesses this day.

After having looked about us in the cleanly little place, which is chiefly inhabited by husbandmen, and inspected its friendly, though not sumptuous rows of houses, in which no beggar's hut is discoverable, and from which we infer the general prosperity of the inhabitants of the town, as well as the simplicity of their manners, we behold a man coming down the street, who, accompanied by a youth, attracts our whole attention by his unusual appearance, and whose dusty clothes point him out to be a travelling stranger. A large rough mantle envelopes his form, a leathern girdle embraces his loins: but his countenance stands in strange contrast with his gloomy attire; for a sunshine of infinite mildness and kindness irradiates it, and nothing but peace and love reflect themselves in his features. Whoever meets the man, stands still, and salutes him reverentially. Even the little children, on perceiving him, cease their play until he has passed by them, or else hasten towards him, and reach him their little hands. He returns with paternal warmth the salutation both right and left, and then proceeds to a house, which by its delightful situation and friendly exterior, distinguishes itself from the other habitations of the place. A well dressed female hastens to the threshold, and with reverential kindness bids the pilgrim welcome. She constrains him to enter, and the stranger follows the cordial and heartfelt invitation.

Who that wanderer is, I do not need to tell you. You have certainly already recognized him. It is our Elisha, and the boy at his side is called Gehazi, and is his pupil and his servant. You must not be surprised that the prophet is known by old and young in Shunem. He had often been in this little town, when travelling to and fro in the land to visit the schools of the prophets; and whenever he felt compelled—which was not unfrequently the case—to

retire from the bustle of the world to his lofty and airy closet of repose and prayer which, as is well known, was situate on the summit of Mount Carmel—Shunem mostly lay in his direct road thither.

But who is the female, who bids him so kindly welcome, at the threshold of the pretty little dwelling? It is with her, that I must now make you a little more acquainted. You have already seen in some measure, that she belongs to the higher and more polished ranks of society. The narrative also confirms this, by calling her a great and affluent woman. However, this is the meanest and most inconsiderable thing that we have to say of her. She is acquainted with other riches, than those which moth and rust consume, and not only knows them, but possesses them too. She belongs to the little flock of those in Israel, who have not bent their knee to Baal. She is a daughter of Abraham according to the Spirit, a soul quickened in God, a beloved of Jehovah, and from the boundless reverence and filial affection which he exemplifies in the most diversified manner towards the holy man of Abel Meholah, it might be supposed that the latter had been the Divine instrument in the conversion of her heart, and therefore her spiritual father. We are not informed on what occasion she became personally acquainted with Elisha. It appears, however, that she had known him for a long time. On passing through the place, he had often eaten bread in her hospitable abode, and for some time he never came to Shunem, without taking up his residence there for the night. For one day, when the worthy woman was sitting down confidentially with her husband, and the conversation turned, as was often the case, upon Elisha, she said with a kind and suppliant mien, "It is now evident that this is a holy man of God, who passes through the place

so frequently. Suppose we prepare a little chamber for him in our house. A partition in the large room above, would soon accomplish the matter. We could then entertain him altogether, as often as he came hither, and should have, at the same time, the happiness and the pleasure of enjoying his company for a longer period, than has been the case hitherto." Her husband, who likewise feared the Lord, was perfectly satisfied with this proposition. In a few days the partition was made, and the chamber ready. A bed was placed in it with a table, chair, and candlestick, and when Elisha came again to Shunem, the married couple conducted him to it, and said, "As often as thou comest to Shunem, turn in hither, consider it as thy own property, dwell there as long as it pleases thee, the longer the better, and go in and out at thy pleasure." And Elisha did so; for he knew well, that under that estimable roof, its owners spoke what they meant. As often as the prophet lodged there, it seemed to the Shunammite and her husband, and to every one in the house, as if the little edifice had suddenly become a temple and a sanctuary. Its inmates ascended and descended the stairs with noiseless steps, lest they should disturb the holy man in prayer or meditation. Every countenance looked more friendly. They knew that this holy man stood in a far more wondrous, close, and intimate connexion with Jehovah than any of them; and often did it seem to them, as if Jehovah himself had taken up his abode with them.

The example of the hospitable Shunammite explains to us in a lovely manner, the expression which we find in the mouth of the Lord Jesus. (Matt. x. 41, 42.) The Lord there says, "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet's reward. And he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man,

shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones, a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily, I say unto you, He shall in no wise lose his reward." The Lord means to say by this, that he who is able to perceive the Divine radiance, shining through the mean attire and lowly form which his children wear,—and he who shows any kindness or affection, be it little or much, to one of his saints, in the name of a saint,—that is, in this character, or because he is a saint and a man of God,—the Lord will reward him for it, and will assuredly bestow something upon him of that fulness of heavenly blessing, which he is wont unceasingly to pour upon the righteous. What say you to this assurance? Is not this elevating and honouring his children, when the Lord is willing to regard and recompense the good done to them no otherwise than as if done to himself? This is truly being well-intentioned towards them, and manifesting maternal tenderness for them, in thus urgently enjoining all the world to receive them kindly, and in openly proclaiming to all the world, with a "verily! verily!" that he offers a high premium to him who shows kindness in any manner to his sheep upon earth. Observe this expression therefore. It was uttered by the high and lofty One. He that acts according to it, and confers a benefit upon a righteous man, in the name of a righteous man,—that is, because he is such a character, even as the Shunammite acted towards Elisha,—let him rest assured, that the blessing of God will flow down upon him and his house; and that perhaps this blessing will consist in the most glorious of all gifts,—in the new birth, the commencement of which such a one already possesses in the spark of love he bears for the children of God; or if he be already born again, the recompense will

probably consist in that gift which, next to regeneration, is the most precious of all,—in an uninterrupted peace in the blood of Jesus, and in a conscience thoroughly healed and perfected. But let him, that hates the righteous, because they are righteous and holy, consider what he, on the contrary, has to expect from a Lord, who is so tenderly attached to his people; and let the love which Jesus bears to them, make him tremble. Let him listen with horror and dismay to the curse in the cxxxviiith psalm, pronounced against opposing Babylon:—"Happy shall he be that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us! Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones!"

II.

We this day find Elisha again at Shumen. He there sits sociably in the company of the pious and friendly couple. The hours fly rapidly away in lovely and devout conversation, and the weariness of our venerable pilgrim from the long day's march soon vanishes in the refreshing spiritual atmosphere, which here surrounds him. O how sweet and lovely it is, when after having long wandered about, and feeling as if exiled amongst the perverse generation of this world, we at length fall in with some quiet tent of Kedar, into which we can flee, even if it be only for a few hours, from the heathenish and irreligious bustle of the world, and when the name of Jesus, and the sweet and friendly salutation of the children of God, of which we have been long deprived, is again heard emanating from a fervent heart! Do we not then sometimes feel like one, who after a long and stormy voyage, at length lands again on the verdant coast of a safe and friendly island? In such outward meetings, something of that delight flows in upon us, which shall be eventually felt at the great and blissful

meeting in the heavenly tabernacles. How are we struck at such times, with the boundless gulph, which is fixed between the Church of the Lord and those that are even the most refined and polite of this world! We immediately feel that we are retreating from the atmosphere of self-seeking into that of love; from the element of lies and deceit into that of truth. We breathe very different and purer air. The breast expands; we feel immersed as it were in a spiritual and wondrous bath, and emerge from it with renewed vigour, and with the certainty that we belong to these people and not to the world; that this is our element, and this our home. In the period of the middle ages, it was delightful in this respect, to travel in this part of the country, and particularly on the Rhine. For there were very many true and enlightened Christians in the midst of the Romish Church, to be met with all the way from Cologne to Mayence, and even to Strasburg, and still further up, who were known by the name of Tisseurs, or Weavers—for this was mostly their trade—and were obliged to keep themselves concealed in order to escape the blood-thirstiness of Papal inquisitors. These people were all of them most intimately connected with each other, and even though they might not have seen each other, yet the one knew the name, abode, circumstances, &c., of the other. When they travelled, they had nothing to do with inns and lodging-houses. They proceeded from the cottage of one brother to that of another, always met with the most cordial and friendly reception, and thus continued unaffected by the infectious and pestiferous atmosphere of the world, in their own element, and wherever they might be, were everywhere at home. This was indeed a pleasing and delightful mode of travelling. O that such were also the case amongst Christians of the present day! There is a superabundance

of blessing and refreshment in the fellowship of the saints, and in Christian intercourse; and it is never felt in a more lively manner, than when the delights of this communion present themselves to us in some foreign land, and after being long deprived of them, and when the cottage of a like-born, like-minded soul is unexpectedly opened to us.

✕ Hence Elisha regarded it as something very pleasing and thankworthy, that on his way through the plain of Jezreel, there was such an agreeable Shunem, and in Shunem such a hospitable mansion. The chamber there was just to his mind; nor would he have exchanged the friendly little room—this tabernacle in the wilderness—for a royal palace. Deeply affected by the numerous proofs of tender affection and veneration with which he was again surprised and refreshed, we now behold him reposing in his peaceful chamber. He utters his evening prayer. The names of his hosts are also clearly articulated in the deeply affected whispers of his mouth. He commends them to God, and then, as if environed by the gentle songs of angels, he sinks into soft and sweet repose.

✕ No sooner is he awake the following morning, than he calls his servant Gehazi. “We must manifest,” says he, “our gratitude to the Shunammite. Go, call her to thee, and say to her, ‘Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?’” Thus spoke Elisha to his attendant. Since the wonderful victory over the Moabites, the prophet was again in credit at court; the king felt under obligation to him, and therefore an intercession on his part with Jehoram, or his ministers, would certainly not have been without effect.

Gehazi goes, executes his commission, and returns. “Well,” inquires Elisha, “what does she desire?” “Noth-

ing," replies Gehazi, "the obligation," says she, "is on her side. She is amply rewarded for her little trouble by thy vouchsafing to take up thy abode under her roof. She has, however, nothing to do with the king and the courts of law. She lives amongst her people in the most peaceful circumstances, and is a stranger to strife and disputes."

"What then can be done for her?" asks the prophet.

"Ah," answered Gehazi, "she hath no child, and her husband is old." "Thou hast hit it," thinks Elisha; and immediately brings the matter before the Lord. A moment afterwards, he receives the Divine assurance in his heart, that his request is granted. "Call the Shunammite," says the prophet. The Shunammite appears, and Elisha, ready to depart, meets her with a friendly salutation. He then says to her, with the seriousness and certainty of a man who is divinely commissioned, "Know that about this season a year hence, thou shalt embrace a son!" "What do I hear," thinks the astonished woman! "How shall that be the case? Nay, my Lord," exclaims she in amazement, "thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid!" But the prophet seizes his staff, presents his right hand at parting to the worthy couple with cordial thanks, wishes salvation and the peace of God to the house, and joyfully proceeds on his way with his youthful attendant.

"I dwell among mine own people," replied the Shunammite to Gehazi. She uttered the words with inward satisfaction. God be thanked, my brethren in the Lord, that we can also boast in a similar manner! Many a one may pride himself upon associating with persons of the loftiest and most illustrious ranks of human society; and others, that they have intercourse with the first spirits of the age, and with proficients in the arts and sciences of this world. We do not envy such characters. But we should envy a

brother in the Lord, who is permitted to reside in the midst of like-minded, like privileged citizens of the kingdom of grace, were we ourselves deprived of this happiness; but this prerogative is enjoyed by us richly, and in a measure which is granted to few. We not only dwell amongst our own people, but even the most unlimited choice is afforded us of closer intercourse and alliance. Every one finds a little circle, with whom he deeply sympathizes, not only in the chief and general points, but even in those that are more particular and singular. Every one is able to meet with two, or three, whom he understands with half a word, and with whom he can converse even without words, in a kind of language of the spirit, upon the most profound and tender subject of feeling, experience, and thought.

“I dwell among my own people!” O sweet privilege, not to be counterbalanced by all the money and wealth of the world! For it is only in Zion where true affection prevails, where sincerity and fidelity reign; where we are in alliance with brethren and sisters, who are so in reality, and where no thought of an eventual separation any longer embitters the cup of sweet and delightful intercourse and fellowship. O let us rejoice at the goodly heritage which is fallen to us, and attach ourselves ever closer to the goodly and fraternal circle in Christ Jesus! Though there may be still much to be desired, and even much that presses onerously upon us, yet the consciousness of dwelling amongst our own people, ought easily to reconcile us to it.

But to return to our narrative. As the prophet predicted, so it fell out. Scarcely had a year elapsed, when the happy mother pressed a dear and lovely infant to her breast. She had thus experienced in a delightful manner, that the God of Sarah and of Hannah still lived, which she

seemed at first to doubt, if we may judge from her words, "Nay, my lord, do not lie unto thine handmaid!" And the God of Israel in the Red Sea lives also; and the God of Daniel in the lion's den, not less so; and the God of the three young men in the flames of the burning fiery furnace, likewise. He lives, and is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Did you only believe, you would see the glory of this God, and behold the King in his beauty.

III.

Our history takes a leap, and suddenly places us several years in advance. The infant son of the happy mother is grown up to be a darling boy, so filial and intelligent that he is the joy and hope of his parents, and their dearest star in the cloudless sky of their habitation. If there are outer-courts of heaven on earth, surely this house at Shunem deserved the name. There, life flowed like a clear stream between flowery banks, and an insuperable barrier seemed to be placed to care and sorrow in this abode. The days of the year approached the threshold of their habitation only as friendly messengers of eternal love, in order to bring them the loveliest bestowments, which heaven possesses, and which earth has for the children of men; and one hour seemed only to relieve the other, in order to pour out new favours and new joys in superabundance upon the highly-favoured inhabitants of that abode.

But after being so long accustomed to happiness and prosperity, that the idea began to obtain a footing in the minds of the worthy couple, that the clear light of their days would never more be clouded, the Almighty sends a messenger of sorrow from the skies, who enters the house of the happy people at Shunem, in the midst of their prosperity and felicity. It was a bright and warm summer

morning. The child's father had been long with the reapers in the field, and his mother ruled at home alone. The little boy said to her, "Mother, let me go to my father in the fields; I should so like to see the men reap the corn and bind it into sheaves." His mother gave him the desired permission. She could let him go without being under anxiety respecting him, for the little boy was prudent, and went neither to the right nor the left. But on the way, he became unwell. He felt a shooting pain in the temples, which became every moment more violent. Holding his head with both his hands, he comes running to his father in the field, and cries, "O father, my head, my head!" His father does not attach much importance to it, and tells one of his servants to conduct him home to his mother.

But who can describe the alarm of the poor Shunammite, on seeing her little boy brought to her, pale as a corpse, already half insensible, moaning with pain, and more dead than alive! With a flood of tears she snatches up the favourite of her heart, lays him in her lap, seeks to warm him in her bosom, and sends hastily for a physician. Every remedy is applied; but the boy's weakness increases. Alas, for the poor mother! She sees the whole edifice of her earthly happiness tottering. Towards eleven o'clock, the boy is already unconscious. Later on, the signs of approaching death manifest themselves. At noon he draws his last breath, and the boy lies pale and stiff in his mother's arms! His mother cannot believe it; she calls him by his name. She beseeches him to open his eyes upon her once more; but in vain. The beauteous little star is extinct, the lovely flower faded, and with it, in an instant, the whole cheerful spring-day of the house at Shunem.

But why did the Lord act thus? I know not my friends, for what reason he found it good to water the plant at Shunem with such sharp and penetrating dew. Whether they were again to become conscious, that heaven is not on earth, but on high; whether their little boy had taken up too much of the Lord's place in their hearts, which he was desirous of regaining; whether the dear people required to be elevated somewhat higher above the eminences of earth, on the pinions of a mighty sorrow; whether they were in danger of forgetting that their whole happiness depended, from one moment to another, on free grace and mercy; and whether they were to be rescued from this danger, I cannot say, my friends; nor state, with certainty, the reason for this painful dispensation. But this I know, that the affair terminated gloriously, and that the sorely tried parents will have only reaped grapes and figs from the thorns of this affliction. The time comes, be assured, when they will cover *that* hand with ardent and affectionate kisses, which thus smote them, and joyfully exclaim, "God be praised, for having conducted us according to his will, and not according to ours!" They will then stand ashamed, for having mourned, though but for a moment, at dispensations in which none but thoughts of love and peace predominated; "All things must work together for good to them that love God." They *must*. An almighty mandate has ordered it thus.

IV.

Where have we left the afflicted mother? She is staggering up the stairs, sobbing aloud, with her dead child in her arms. O, what are her feelings! "Thou little human heart, thinks she—what a world full of pain and woe canst thou contain!" Her senses are ready to

leave her, by reason of the depth of her grief and her sorrow. She carries her lifeless favourite up to Elisha's chamber, and lays him down, softly and gently, upon the prophet's bed, as if the dear boy were only asleep. She then looks at him once more, and calls him by his name. In doing so she recalls the memory of a lost paradise, a life which has faded with its thousandfold delights. She covers once more his pale countenance with kisses and ardent tears, then forcibly tears herself away from the beloved corpse, closes the door, and hastens back to the servant, who had brought home the boy; and after having conjured him in the most urgent manner, not to say anything respecting the mournful event to her husband, who was in the habit of remaining, during harvest-time, the whole day until evening with the reapers in the field—for she thought if he heard of it, he would not survive it—she despatches him to her husband, with the request, that he would immediately send her a boy with an ass, since she wished to travel to the man of God, on mount Carmel, but would soon return. The order is quickly given, and the boy with the ass soon arrives. The hasty resolution of the Shunammite, however, appears rather strange to her husband. He sends to enquire, why she wishes to go to the man of God on that day, since it was neither Sabbath, nor new moon; for on those days Elisha probably held meetings for edification, on the solitary summit of Mount Carmel, on which occasions the worthy couple were wont to be present. The Shunammite returns her husband only a general and indefinite answer; and then, after she had saddled the ass, she says to her servant, "Drive and go forwards; slack not thy riding for me, except I bid thee!" And thus the weeping, sorely tried woman, hastens to the holy Seer, to entreat that he would cause his prayers for her to ascend into the heavenly sanctuary, and to the

throne of the Almighty, if possible to induce the God of gods, by his intercession, to speak a word of omnipotence, and restore the dear boy to her from the dead.

The Shunammite arrives at Carmel. The prophet perceives her, and not without anxiety sends the young Gehazi to meet her. "Run," says he, "and ask her, whether it is well with her husband and her son?" "It is well," replies the poor woman, unconscious of what she is saying, and hastens towards the man of God. And when she approaches him, what a heartrending scene occurs! Before Elisha is aware, the deeply afflicted mother lies sobbing at his feet, and with trembling hands embraces his knees. Gehazi, under the impression that such importunity might be disagreeable to his master, and that it was contrary to the reverence due to him, acts like the disciples subsequently did towards those mothers, who were bringing their children to Jesus. With an expression of displeasure, he lays hold of the trembling woman, in order to tear her away from the prophet's feet. But Elisha's compassionate heart commands the youth to leave the afflicted woman in peace, who now begins with a faltering voice, rendered almost inaudible by weeping, to tell the prophet what had befallen her. But scarcely has Elisha learned from the Shunammite the cause of her nameless grief, than the wish burns also in his affectionate heart, that God would permit him, by a resurrection miracle, to dry the tears of the disconsolate mother. Hoping the best from eternal love, he says to Gehazi, "Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thy hand, and go back to Shunem. Hasten and stay not on the way. If thou meet any one, salute him not, and if any salute thee, answer him not again. Ascend into the upper chamber at Shunem, and lay my staff upon the boy's face."

No sooner had Gehazi received these commands, than

he seizes the staff, and proceeds upon his way. The commission pleases him. "Ah!" thinks the volatile youth, "I now bear the sceptre, and am now a king." Delighted at being for once surrounded by the radiance and glory of his master, he runs almost breathless towards the little town, and if he had only dared, he would have called out to every one who met him, "Come to Shunem, and see a miracle performed!" He arrives at Shunem. What a solemn air the foolish boy puts on! With what gravity he enters the house of mourning! "I now come," says he, "to deprive death of his prey, and to restore to you the child that is lost. Where is the corpse lying?" He is conducted up the stairs, and the chamber of death is opened for him. Slowly and with measured steps Gehazi approaches the lifeless corpse, looks at it with strange and mysterious gestures, then lays the wonder-working staff upon the pallid countenance, and does not doubt that the deceased will immediately open his eyes, and raise himself up from his couch. The mourning domestics stand round the room full of expectation; but the corpse does not move. "I have a little patience," thinks Gehazi, and places the staff in another position; but in vain; the corpse continues stiff and insensible. The young wonder-worker then lays the staff first in one position, and afterwards in another; but without effect; there is neither sound nor motion, neither voice nor hearing. Deplorable scene! The spectators cast their eyes embarrassed on the gound. Gehazi, the ridiculous object of their compassion, does not dare to look up for shame, and would give much to have done with the prophetic part he has taken upon him to act. "Ah!"—thinks he, thrown back out of his fancied greatness, into the most mortifying embarrassment, "it seems that, the staff alone is insufficient. Nor do any grimaces,

or the Abracadabra avail. I imagine that it greatly depends upon the hand that guides the staff—whether it be that of a master, or a vain and forward boy. Neither death nor the devil seem to have any fear of me!” It was necessary that the frivolous youth should be brought to such-like reflections ; and Elisha wished it to be so—nay, one might almost suppose, that it was simply with the view to teach him such a lesson as this, that the prophet sent him with his staff to Shunem.

But the lesson which Gehazi derived from the deplorable scene, is also given to us to learn. It is not the staff of a man of God, that can produce the desired effect. It is that which he is able afterwards to add to it which proves effectual. Prayer is a wondrous rod, as well as adjuration in the name of Jesus, and the boldness of faith, in some particular promise. How often has the kingdom of Satan been obliged to fly before it, mountains to remove and seas to divide ; even the world is subject to its nod, if faith only handles the staff. But where the mere form is to effect it, nothing ensues but the caricature of a saint, and ridiculous Gehazi scenes, whatever artificial emotions may be added as a substitute for faith. How often has it fared with many, as it did with the exorcising sons of the high priest Sceva, who are mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, xix. 13. These people wished to imitate Paul, as Gehazi did his master Elisha. “We adjure you by Jesus, whom Paul preacheth,” said they with great pathos. But the evil spirit, not afraid of the theatrical sceptre of these imaginary heroes, answered and said, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know ; but who are ye ? And the man in whom the evil spirit was, leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.” It is an easy matter,

my friends, for a person to clothe his petitions in the *form* of that prayer, to which everything is promised. It is easy to command one thing to depart, and another to come, in the name of Jesus; it is child's play to plead with the Lord his promises, and afterwards desire the blessing of him with a commanding tone; or to administer the office of the keys, and with apostolic demeanour, announce to one that his sins are forgiven him, and to another that they are retained. But the mere formulary is an empty sound. Faith alone can give efficacy to the words. Have faith, even but as a grain of mustard-seed, and all things will be subject to you. If thou merely *act* the believer, and play the master whilst thus acting, thou shalt leave the stage in confusion, like a fool.

V.

The Shunammite was not satisfied from the first, that Elisha merely sent his servant. What did she care about *him* in her sorrow? It seemed evident to her that death would not depart at *his* bidding. Elisha himself, must come. With all the impetuosity of a maternal heart, that is breaking with anguish, she urges him to follow her. "Thou must," says she. "Did I desire a son of my lord? Did I not say, Do not deceive me?" It is therefore a kind of reproach; as if she had said, "Thou hadst no need to beg a son for me, from Jehovah, if he were to be taken from me again!" Certainly in moments of more tranquil reflection, she would not have spoken thus. But it is pain that now speaks, and that love, which, as with one blow, is thrown out of all its earthly heaven. In such situations, it is often the case with believers, that the whole landscape of their mental world presents itself unveiled to view. The lovely and flowery fields of the new

nature appear in their celestial and beneficial beauty ; but the deserts of the old also show themselves with their smoking craters, and the torrents and cataracts of unsanctified affections and passions. "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth," continues the Shunammite, addressing Elisha, "I will not leave thee." In reality, urgency of such a kind would have softened a heart of stone. But in Elisha's case, such violence was unnecessary. He willingly accompanied her, and would have done so, even if she had not entreated him. Love, compassion, and the desire to aid, would not have suffered him to remain.

O, how glad is the sorely afflicted mother, when the prophet once commences his return with her ! It seems to her, as if her son were already restored to life. She beheld in spirit, her cottage at Shunem, again lying before her in the sun's most cheerful light ; the black clouds over it have dispersed, and made room for the dawn of new days of joy. The sight of the man of God at her side, elevates her above all care and sorrow. In his presence, she finds the firmest assurance that all will now end gloriously. He is to her like a walking tree of paradise, from which she already plucks the sweetest fruits of consolation, and thinks that she shall soon receive from him the most effectual aid. But if the presence of a human friend, in whom only a slight glimmer of the Divine power and grace was reflected, was able to strew her path with such rosy light, how cheerfully may we pursue our way, who know that we have Him at our side, in whom dwells the fulness of all love and Divine power bodily, and the latchet of whose shoe, even Elisha would not have thought himself worthy to unloose.

Not far from Shunem, Gehazi is seen hastening towards them, in order, ashamed, to inform his master, that

the imposition of the staff had not availed, and that the dead child had not awoke. "Well," replied Elisha, thinking his own thoughts, "I will come;" and thus he enters the little town, with the woman and the ass at his side. And many who saw the poor mother coming along the street, were probably astonished, and whispered to each other with surprise, "How happy and joyful she seems all at once, just as if she were proceeding to a marriage feast!" But others probably guessed the reason of it, and thought, "Something will take place to day in Shunem; for the man of God is at her side."

Elisha enters the house of mourning, followed by the mother of the child. Her husband, who had meanwhile returned home, receives them, weeping aloud, as do likewise the domestics. But she enjoins silence upon them. "Weep not," says she; "the Lord will help." Elisha immediately requests the chamber of death to be opened. Without saying a word, he enters it in a very different manner from Gehazi—gravely, simply, and without ceremony; and, after requesting to be left alone awhile with the corpse, he closes the door of the chamber, and begins impetuously to assail the throne of Majesty and Grace. Now, Death and Satan, prepare yourselves for the conflict: here is more than Gehazi, more than a wooden staff, more than the noise of an empty formulary. Here is confidence in the Almighty's word and arm; here the power of faith, which removes mountains, and the wonder-working breath of prayer.

At the prophet's first intercession, the bonds of death do not dissolve. He then extends himself upon the corpse, and lays his mouth on the child's mouth, and his eyes upon its eyes, and his hands upon its hands, and thus stretches himself upon him, so that the body of the child derives warmth from it. But why does he do this? He


does it from the impetuosity of holy emotions. The child must live again to the glory of God; and rather than Death should retain it, the prophet pours out his own life into it. "Lord," is his meaning, "I and this child are one. I will not leave the boy. He shall either partake of life with me, or I will share the grave with him. Wilt thou, Lord, that Elisha should in future walk upon earth—awaken this dead child, for I am dead with him. If thou leave him a prey to death, thou hast also slain thy servant; for I will not leave this corpse."

Such was the language of the striking demeanour of the prophet. But even this impetuous and urgent prayer proves ineffectual. The man of God then rises up from the corpse, opens the chamber door and walks out, and traverses the house, first in one direction and then in another, from room to room, forgetting himself, with folded hands, and looks directed upwards. It is necessary to do violence to him that will not hear, and to burst the bar of heaven's gates. O arduous conflict! O distressing and violent struggle! He wrestles for the life of the deceased child. His weapons are his fervent ejaculations, his sighs, and his tears. He pleads with the Almighty everything which he thinks may in anywise soften his heart, and induce him to hear. The honour of his name, which is here more especially concerned; his promises; the love which he has engaged eternally to bear towards himself and towards the Shunammite; the grief and nameless sorrow of the latter; the sacrifice of the promised surety; and many other things beside. He then hastens back again to the chamber, and throws himself again upon the corpse, clings to it afresh, and prays, entreats, and wrestles with such importunity, as if he had really resolved to overcome God, or die at his feet.

But now, O intensely-desired event! the boy begins to

sneeze and to yawn—a sign of returning life ; and, after having sneezed seven times, he opens his eyes, looks at the prophet with a lively and cheerful countenance, and—lives. Elisha immediately calls Gehazi, and says to him, “Call this Shunammite.” Gehazi fulfils his commission, and says to her, “The master calleth thee.” The happy mother starts up exultingly from her seat, and all the strings of the harp of her heart begin already to resound to the joyful words, “Bless the Lord!” for she has no doubt that she is called to receive her favourite again. She rushes in, almost breathless with joy. Her hopes have not deceived her. The prophet meets her at the threshold of his chamber, holding by the hand the beautiful boy, smiling in all the rosy bloom of vitality, and says to her, briefly and brokenly—for the agitated feelings of his deeply-affected mind will not suffer him to say more—“There, take up thy son!” The sight of the boy, and the falling at Elisha’s feet, which she waters with a flood of joyful tears, is the action of one and the same moment. One hallelujah after the other ascends up from the depth of her affected soul to the throne of Him who has done such great things for her. She has not only her son again, but also her God. The restored boy is a new proof of Jehovah’s favour; a living monument, with the inscription, “Fear not; for I am the Lord, I am with thee!” And he is still more than this to her, infinitely more. Imagine what Isaac must have been to Abraham, after having been offered up! Her favourite is now all this to the happy Shunammite.

“And she took up her son, and went out,” as the narrative informs us in conclusion. We may well suppose whither; but this time we cannot follow her. The relation closes the chamber after her. We walk past it with

noiseless steps, and hear within a sobbing, as it would seem, at one time for joy, at another for confusion, and broken words are heard between—words of supplication, adoration, and grateful thanksgiving. We will now leave the unspeakably affected woman.  She lies at the Lord's feet, with an overflowing heart, along with her child. She renews the resignation of her heart to the God of her salvation. She devotes her child to him for an eternal possession; and lays down her all at the steps of his throne. Sacred and important moment! But let us pass on, my friends! such moments must not be secretly listened to. Let us, however, rejoice that the Lord glorifies his name in such a manner amongst the children of men, and that his mercy endureth for ever towards those, whose names stand written in the Book of Life.

VII.

DEATH IN THE POT.

Who never saw death, and yet died ? A strange question, it must be confessed. To be dead, without having seen death, seems folly, contradiction, and absurdity. Certainly, he who is an entire stranger to the mysteries of the Gospel will not regard it in any other light. And yet the question is not so foolish as it seems to be. It is only an enigma ; nor is there any want of a key to it. The solution is wonderful and glorious. What ! are there really persons who have died, although their dying-hour has not arrived ? Yes, such there are. Probably they died in a dream ? No, in reality. They actually died, although they still live amongst us.

Who are these wonderful people ? You are of the number, as many of you as have put on Christ. It is to you the Apostle addresses the words in Gal. iii. 3, " Ye are dead ! " O, how wonderful ! You have survived yourselves ; not merely your friends, but you yourselves stood by your dying bed, and are able to visit your own grave—nay, if you will to preach your own funeral sermon. What I am now saying of you probably seems not a little strange to you, and you reply, " Where did we die ; where was our dying bed ; where is our tomb ? " And do you really not know ? Know you not the mount on which your Head suffered death, the death place of the second Adam ? And have you again forgotten how the Scriptures are wont to call those who belong to Christ, " crucified

with him," and "dead and buried with him?" "And is the matter to be understood thus?" Certainly, in its primary signification. Look to Calvary. What is it there that falls upon the Holy One of Israel? It comes like a monster on the wings of night. It comes with a thousand terrors, horrors, and torments; the wrath of the Almighty is its escort, exulting devils are in its train. It rushes on without bit or bridle. It can do as it pleases with the man on the cross. No consoling angel stands at the side of him who is thus assaulted; no shield from on high defends him against the rage of the goblin. He is forsaken of God and of all the world. In this horrible situation, he sees the hideous monster assail him. It extinguishes the light of his eyes, breaks his heart, shrouds his limbs with icy paleness, and amid the triumphant cries of hell, tears body and soul asunder. What horrible being is this? With what name shall this dreadful destruction of the eternal Son, this bloody catastrophe and desolation, be designated? Death is its name. "And whose is the death which Christ dies?" It is not Christ's death; it is thy death and mine. It is the death of the curse, which was sworn against us sinners. But a holy Mediator endures it. He endures it for us, in our stead, and in our name. We therefore endure it in him. We are dead in him, actually and legally dead; and that in such a manner, that we have once for all paid in Christ these wages of sin; dead in such a manner, that dying, with respect to what is to be feared in it, can no longer befall us; that were we once to die, in the dreadful sense of the word, the justice of God would be forfeited—so dead, that we can now inscribe our old man in the book of the dead, and with a "*Quiescat in pace!*" and an "adieu for ever!" can reckon him amongst those things which no longer exist in the sight of God, but are

committed to the deep gulph of eternal oblivion. See, my friends ! this is the ground on which we triumphantly exclaim, "Death, where is thy sting ! Grave, where is thy victory !" If we only firmly occupied this position on the rock of truth, we should see the king of terrors lying trodden down beneath our feet, and the horrors of death and the grave would be dispelled with respect to us. Death lies behind us. "We are dead."

2 KINGS iv. 38—41.

"And Elisha came again to Gilgal, and there was a dearth in the land, and the sons of the prophets were sitting before him : and he said unto his servant, Set on the great pot, and seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets.

"And one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered thereof wild gourds, his lap full, and came and shred them into the pot of pottage : for they knew them not.

"So they poured out for the men to eat : and it came to pass, as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out, and said, O thou man of God, there is death in the pot ; and they could not eat thereof.

"But he said, Then bring meal. And he cast it into the pot ; and he said, Pour out for the people, that they may eat. And there was no harm in the pot."

Though the narrative we have just read does not appear so attractive and pregnant with subjects for consideration as the one we have lately meditated upon, yet the words of the Apostle are also confirmed in it, that "*all* Scripture, given by inspiration of God, is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction, and for correction in righteousness." The narrative leads us to truths and ideas, which, abstractedly considered, are of high importance, but which are doubly interesting to us from the circumstances of the

times in which we live. It presents the living God to our view, and shows us that he lets himself be found by his children in days of necessity and oppression ; nor do I err in supposing that such-like representations, taken from the life, will at present correspond in an especial manner with the necessities of our hearts.

Let us then contemplate a little more closely the individual features of the narrative. There are three ideas which particularly claim our attention : first, **THE PEOPLE OF THE LORD IN A STATE OF PURIFICATION** ; secondly, **DEATH AMONGST THE HEIRS OF HEAVEN** ; and, thirdly, **THE ALMIGHTY HAND OF OUR FAITHFUL GOD**.

I.

It is on the road to Gilgal, that we this day meet with the man of God. You know the little town of Gilgal ; it lay in the lower provinces, in the vale of Jordan, not far from Jericho. Here, also, as you will remember, stood a flourishing school of the prophets, in the midst of a deeply-degraded and idolatrous race, and it was from Gilgal that we accompanied the Tishbite to his triumphal car and crowning festival in the desert. How have the plains of Israel changed their appearance, since our last visit ! Who can recognize the beautiful country ! How is it become a barren waste ! At that time, you know, we beheld ourselves surrounded by waving cornfields, as far as the eye could reach. Heavy-laden wagons, breaking down almost with the produce of the harvest, passed before us on every road. The orange-trees, as well as the vines, were scarcely able any longer to support the burden of their luxuriant fruit. In short, we met with nothing but marks of blessing and abundance in every direction, and there was scarcely any end, either day or night, to the exultings of

the reapers and the binders of the sheaves, and the rejoicings of the vintagers upon the hills. The case is different now. A dreadful dearth has befallen the land. The fields lie scorched, and as if under the curse; the sickles hang rusting upon the walls, and famine already appears amongst a great part of the population, which manifests itself the more unequivocally as a dispensation of Divine wrath, the less the people are habituated to this most blessed and fruitful of all countries, to such-like seasons of deficiency. Even the sons of the prophets, whose wealth, as you well know, did not consist in ready cash, shared in the general distress.

Elisha is desirous of visiting them. Had he chosen it, he might have remained at Shunem, where he would have been gladly entertained by his more wealthy friends, and have known little or nothing, under their hospitable roof, of the suffering occasioned by the pressure of the times. But Elisha would not have consented to this on any account. No, said he to himself, my post is at Gilgal. His heart as well as his calling attached him to the sons of the prophets; and a good shepherd does not flee, when distress seizes upon his flock; on the contrary, it is to him a precious opportunity of sharing every thing, and even death itself, with them.

It was laudable in the magnanimous Emperor of Russia, when the dreadful scourge of the Asiatic pestilence was brandished over his territories, that he did not, like others, seek an asylum abroad, but remained quietly amongst his people, and even visited the infected cities, in order, with their inhabitants, to cast himself on his bended knees in the open streets, into the arms of Divine compassion, and to supplicate for himself and his subjects the Almighty's favour and deliverance. It was laudable and perfectly in

order, that during the same distressing season, missionaries, who resided far in the East, replied with holy zeal to well-meaning friends, who advised them to seek their safety on the hills and mountains, "May the Lord prevent us from ever being guilty of such a mercenary step." Certainly he only can manifest such fidelity with real boldness and heartfelt determination, into whose breast a spark has fallen of the love of him, who could say in a sense which no other can, "I am the good shepherd. He that is an hireling and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth, because he careth not for the sheep." But the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. O that this shepherd's love may consume all the abominations of self within us!

Elisha enters Gilgal. His little flock present a mournful aspect. The people have consumed the last remains of their limited stock of provisions. Their gardens are empty, as well as their presses and their purses. The poor really suffer need, and their wealthier fellow-citizens feel sooner inclined to ask them, in a tone of mockery, "Where is now your God?" than to extend to them a helping hand. The favourites of the Almighty are therefore in straits; and what advantage have they over the wicked? Do not they languish in the same distress? Does not the same wrathful cloud rest upon them? Oh how often do we meet on earth with this strange spectacle! Indeed it not unfrequently happens, that the children of God suffer more severely than the children of the world, and that help comes to the latter much sooner than to the former. Are there not many amongst you who are able to adduce proofs of this from the sphere of your own experience? But I hear you say, "There is something unac-

countable in this." Doubtless, my friends, and things might be even still more strange. "Where then is the difference," you ask, "between those whom God loves, and others against whom his wrath is inflamed?" In their outward circumstances this difference disappears. According to the flesh, they both fall into the same straits. And yet you need only look a little deeper into the matter, to discover an infinite difference, notwithstanding the most perfect similarity of outward fate, between the state of those who serve God, and those who tread the path of death. What very different fruits, my brother, does the same thorn-bush of tribulation bear in thy field to that of thy impenitent neighbour! It brings thee figs and grapes; but him only sour grapes, which, in his case, produce death. In what a very different manner does the same misery enter thy cottage, and that of the former! There it appears as a scourge, brandished by the uplifted hand of an angry judge; in thy case it is only the rod of faithful, well-meant, correction, reluctantly guided by the hand of the utmost paternal tenderness and love. On what a very different shore does the wave of affliction cast thee, compared with others! it throws thee at the feet and on the bosom of the great Preserver of man; whilst they are cast on the sand-bank of sadness, and on the destructive rocks of despondency. How differently does the same cloud of trouble descend upon thee, and upon those that are without! To the latter it is only the shadow of death, the abode of care, anxiety, and despair. To thee, it approaches like the vapoury cloud above the ark of the covenant, in which thy Lord and God draws near to thee, in order to breathe into thy heart strength to endure, and to whisper words of consolation. If I listen to thee in the night of thy sorrow, what do I hear? "Ah, if I did not possess thee, my Lord

Jesus," I hear thee say, "what would become of me!" Never did I hear thee sigh thus in prosperous days. See, what a blessing thy cross affords thee, even in this respect! What a pleasing gain, that thou art now so vitally conscious how happy thou art in thy Jesus. If I watch thee in thy solitude, what do I perceive? I see thee humbled in the dust, with many tears, and hear the repeated confession escape from thy breast, that thou deservest to be smitten with the world, and that nothing is left thee but to take refuge in God's free mercy and compassion. O, what another sweet consequence is this of the pressure of affliction! For thee it is not a judgment, but a benefit, that thou art chastised with the ungodly. But for them it is a judgment, that God, instead of distinguishing thee by wonders of leniency, renders thee outwardly, just like them, and thus disguises thy real appearance. For this strengthens them in the unhappy delusion, that the same fate befalls the righteous as the unrighteous; this perfectly confirms them in their unbelief, and this leads the deluded mortals to heap up wrath against the day of wrath and revelation.

On our arrival this day at Gilgal, under the guidance of our narrative, a pleasing and heart-refreshing spectacle presents itself. Where do we meet with the sons of the prophets? Yonder they are sitting together, with their master paternally in their midst. Elisha speaks, consoles, and encourages, and they eagerly feed upon the words of life, which flow from his lips like a balsamic stream. They think they have for a long time never seen him so open-hearted as now. How happy they feel in his company; the man of God is to them like a bright and genial star, which has arisen in the night of their affliction. The shadows of care disperse before the power of his discourse,

as the fogs before the rays of the sun, and every eye again looks bright and cheerful.

Yes, my friends, even the days of tribulation have their sweet and pleasing intervals, which they bring disguised under the gloomy mantle of sorrow, whilst other days present them to us openly and in festive attire; and although such seasons cause distress, yet they are like vernal storms, which open the springs and cause them to flow. They are the days in which the spices of the Divine promises yield their perfume, and when a resurrection-breath pervades the graves of the prophets of God. The ancient and hoary comforters then express themselves audibly to us, and their feet are beautiful upon the mountains. A number of passages, which in brighter days were either unheeded or unappreciated, burn now in our hemisphere, as blissful and wondrous luminaries. Openings and peaceful retreats are discovered in the temple of the Scriptures, of which we had previously no idea. The spirit celebrates blissful and paradisiacal festivities; while the soul often lies in profound sorrow, and whilst the flesh writhes in the glowing crucible, the mind rejoices that the refiner is near.

After Elisha, by his cheering discourse, had expelled care from the circle of his beloved pupils, and given their hearts a different tone, he says in a cheerful mood, to his servant, "Set on the great pot, and seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets." But there were no longer any vegetables on hand, nor even a green leaf perceptible in the gardens. One of the pupils, therefore, hastens out into the fields, to see—for it had come to such a length with them—whether he could not find beneath the hedges, or behind the fences, some herb that was even but half edible. You now, probably, think that God, in his great

garden, will have left some little plant for them. So one would think. "Certainly he will conduct the man to the right place, and guide his hands and his feet." And what is more natural than to think thus? The man meets with something. His eye falls upon a luxuriant creeper, which is entirely covered with beautiful egg-shaped fruit. Full of joy, he collects the glittering apples into his vest. "The poor man will not have made a mistake?" We should not think that God, whose child he is, would permit that. I know not for what kind of fruit the man may have taken them. Be it as it may, he thinks he has made a wonderful discovery, hastens rapidly home, and immediately begins to shred the fruit into the pot, in order to make pottage of it, not imagining that he was shredding poison for the pottage. "Poison?" Assuredly, it was wild *coloquintida* which the man had gathered. "And could God see this without preventing it?" God suffered it to be so. "But was not that cruel?" Hush! hush! his name is "Wonderful." Restrain your judgment till his ways have reached their termination. He suffers strange knots to be tied in the lives of his children, but only to manifest his glory in their unloosing. He guides the humble aright. His ways are mercy and truth.

The pottage is prepared and served up. The brethren take their seats unsuspectingly and well pleased at the table. "And yet they are not divinely warned?" No, the Lord permits it. They even really take and eat. But scarcely have they tasted the fatal food, when its unhappy effects manifest themselves. A nausea seizes the poor people, accompanied with an intolerable pain in the intestines. They think they are enduring the pangs of death. They rise up with pitiable gestures from their seats, and exclaim, whilst writhing and twisting, "O man of God,

there is death in the pot!" Truly, a heart-breaking scene! They had sat down to table so comfortable and happy in God, and at the same time so full of inward gratitude for the renewed refreshment, whilst saying to each other, "The keeper of Israel does not abandon us!" and then to feel, all at once, this unexpected suffering. What a cutting reverse, what a jarring dissonance in the cheerful harmony of their newly animated confidence in God! Truly, the most filial faith might have suffered shipwreck from such an occurrence. But when the Lord acts thus strangely towards his people, he does so, primarily, in order to draw from their hearts the exclamation of weeping Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him!" and he does so, secondly, in order to prepare a place for the triumph and glorification of His delivering grace: and thirdly, in order to make way for those tears of confusion, which are wont, after seasons of murmuring and repining, to flow so extremely beneficially, like a refreshing and re-animating dew upon the noblest plants of the Divine planting in the garden of our hearts.

II.

But what shall we say to the fact of the heirs of heaven at Gilgal exemplifying, as it would seem, such extreme fear in the prospect of death? For no sooner do they imagine themselves touched by his icy hand, than they utter a cry, as loud as if some beast from the bottomless pit were threatening to swallow them up. And at whom are they thus terrified? They tremble at the messenger who is sent to bid them to the marriage-feast of their heavenly bride-groom; at the pilot, who is to steer them from Mesech to Jerusalem; at the appearance of him who wipes away all tears, and who conducts us from an uninhabitable desert

to the most blissful home. But they behold in this well-meaning friend and messenger of peace a spectre, a dragon with glaring eyes, a horrible and grinning monster, at whose first gentle salutation their very hair stands on end. But what would have been the result, if death had really been in the pot? In a few moments they would have sat down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the heavenly table, or have reclined by the rivers of eternal felicity; and would have been for ever delivered from all care and distress. But an evil cramp contracted the eye of their faith, and therefore they saw nothing of all this. The eye of unbelieving nature alone was open in them, and hence they found themselves, as it were, in a masquerade, where they perceived the most friendly forms in the most horrible caricatures and disguises.

It is disgraceful for children of God to quake at the sight of death. If our brethren under Moses were not always able triumphantly to greet the approach of the last hour, it was pardonable in them, because of the clouds, which threw their obscurity around it, as it respected them. But if we can still exhibit symptoms of childish cowardice and female terror at the approach of this liberator, who enjoy the opened heavens of the New Testament, and the express declarations of the Saviour, we pay just as rude a compliment to him as we do to ourselves, in thus branding ourselves on the forehead with the disgraceful characteristics of a stupid and unbelieving race. My God! how are we armed against this strong man! Think only of the breast-plate of perfection, which covers our breasts; of the sword of the most blissful promises, which glitters in our right hands; of the helmet of the most infallible hope, which rests upon our heads; and of the assurances of the most certain victory, with which our feet are shod.

Graves have been forced to open themselves before us, in order to prove to us that they are only resting-places; dead bodies have risen from corruption, in order to expel from us the dread of annihilation; glorified saints have descended from heaven to earth, that we might see with our eyes, that death only transfers us to a better state; and hosts of angels visibly hover towards us, in order, by their appearance, to swear, as it were, a corporal oath, that the world to come is not a dream, not a vapour, but a reality, and that in a much stricter sense than the present.

But why should I describe the being armed against death, as if the death of the righteous were still an enemy, and his approach a hostile attack? Is such a term applicable, when a mother gently lays her suckling in the cradle? Is that a warlike invasion, when a friend draws near to break open my prison doors, that I may hasten into the open air? Ought I to sound an alarm, when I am taken hold of, in order to be carried away from a couch of thorns and thistles, into Abraham's bosom? Ought we to cling to a post, when a solemn procession is approaching, to place upon our heads the crown of life? And yet all this, which I have now stated, occurs in the act which we call dying, in accordance with the assurances of him, who attached omnipotent acts to his words instead of a seal, and who, in order that our hope might have a more than sufficient basis, soared before our eyes, with our flesh and blood, through the heavens, and left behind him the joyful assertion, "I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, ye may be also." It is not therefore against death that I have to prepare myself. Death's intentions are kind with respect to me. I have only to arm myself against the devil, lest he disguise the true form of death, and throw over him a spectral mask; to arm myself

against my imagination, lest it torment me with visions which are entirely unsubstantial; against my sinful flesh, least in its stupid cowardice, it should retain the upper hand; and against my unbelief, which staggers, like Martha, at the effluvia of corruption, instead of turning its nose towards the flowery fragrance from the rose.

It is however in the common course of things, that a Christian should feel strangely, when the last visitor presents his salutations to him. What a step is that, from one world into another! What a transition, as in the twinkling of an eye, from the closet of repose to the presence of the highly exalted, and the company of holy angels! How can he avoid feeling peculiarly at such a moment, or his heart refrain from beating at the approach of such a crisis? But if it beat more from any other cause than from sacred anticipation, and solemn and joyful expectancy, he mistakes his position and has abandoned his post.

A Christian who is unwilling to die, breaks his word. What did we engage, when we united ourselves to the Lord? The world then lost us—nay, we even became lost to ourselves. Our prayer was, “Lord, do with me, as thou wilt!” And we yielded up body and soul to our deliverer, with a most unlimited surrender. But now that he is desirous of availing himself of the right over us, which we have resigned to him; when he is willing to accept the offering which we freely consecrated to him, and accomplish his gracious will in us, as we requested he would—is it proper for us to draw back, and with a struggle resume the possession of that which we had dutifully presented to him? At our conversion, we died; inasmuch as we carried every thing to the altar of our God, even our body and our life. At the moment of death, he graciously accepts the offering. How reasonable therefore is

it, that we should calmly bow to his hand, and greet our dying hour as a festive season.

Our dying is a being called away by God. No one dies by chance ; but at the moment when he ought to die, and neither sooner or later. "All our days," says the Scripture, "are written in his book." "Is there not an appointed time," exclaims Job, "for man upon earth?" Our death is not a consequence of sickness or the sword, but is of God. An eternal decree regulates our entrance into life, and our departure out of it. Hence how unbecoming is it in a Christian, to be so much afraid and terrified at death ! No fall, no arrow, no disease shall injure him, as long as his hour, which stands inscribed with his name in the mighty book, is not come. And when it arrives, what takes place ? A voice of love and maternal affection exclaims, "Return, ye children of men !" and who would then unwillingly obey ?

Death, as you know, stands likewise in the inventory of the things belonging to the children of God. Paul assures us that "Death is ours." It belongs to us, and not we to it. Death, though it be to the Christian a rude, is nevertheless a faithful friend. It is to him what the rod of God was to Moses, of which he was himself afraid, though without reason ; but which afterwards brought him through the Red Sea, and into the land, flowing with milk and honey. Death can do me no more injury, than David did to king Saul, when he cut off the skirt of his garment. It is to me like Samson's lion, of which it is written, "Out of the eater, came forth meat, and out of the strong, came forth sweetness." "Death," says a wise man, "is a great teacher." When he extinguishes the sun and the moon from our earthly view, which refuse to regard any other than created light, a superior, spiritual, and eternal

light rises upon us, in comparison with which, all other suns are but spots, and all the created light of this world is but shade.

Death comes with the standard of liberty. He delivers us from sin, the most horrible of all abominations. As long as we walk here below, we are connected with a dead carcase. We cannot prevent accursed thoughts from springing up in our hearts continually, as sparks from the fire of the smithy. Sin, though forgiven, still cleaves to us, and oppresses us. We wish to pray; but our hearts are like a lute unstrung. We would gladly weep; but our eyes are like clouds without water. The flesh continually lusts against the spirit. We have no need for the wind of temptation to blow upon us; the stream in our hearts is powerful enough to drive us continually onward to new falls. Hence death is the last and best physician, who heals all our wounds, and infirmities—the sick head, and the faint and diseased heart. Sin was the parent of death: death is the grave, which again swallows up sin. The death of the body annihilates the body of death. It strips us of our filthy garments, in order that it may cover us with the sumptuous robe of immortality.

When old Jacob saw the chariots, which Joseph had sent to bring him to Goshen, it is said, the old man's spirit revived. Such ought also to be the influence exercised upon the Christian in the anticipation of his last hour. Death is to him only a fiery chariot which his Joseph sends to carry him to Goshen; is to him like that which carried up Elijah; a little vessel with azure pennants, which impelled forwards by the wind of grace, steers to golden shores. "The day of death," says Solomon, "is better than the day of one's birth." It is the ascension-day of the Christian, the birth-day of his real life. Death

is his gain, his greatest advancement, in which he rises Phoenix-like from the ashes of his imperfections, into a state of perfection and eternal brightness.

Death is to the Christian, a splendidly attired herald, who invites him to the heavenly marriage feast, who escorts him thither, where he shall behold Him without a vail, the sight of whom he justly regards as the most precious diamond in the cincture of heavenly felicities. And he will behold him, not like Adam, who was afraid, and hid himself; but like Esther, on seeing King Ahasuerus, who graciously extended his golden sceptre towards her. He will bask in the smile of his countenance, and still more blest than John, will recline upon his bosom. Every desire shall then be satisfied, every sense find sweet employment—the eye, with the image of the fairest amongst the children of men; the ear, with salutations, and harmonies, compared with which, the most ravishing melody of earth is a poor discord; the smell, with an odour of life, of which we have here no idea; the taste, with the manna of the Divine good pleasure, and with the sweet wine of love; the understanding, with the light of the most perfect wisdom; the heart, with the ability to love, as it is desirous of doing; the will, with the most unlimited power of accomplishment; and the whole soul, with the delightful consciousness, that these joys will never end, for the ever-green chaplet of eternity is twined around them.

Hence, how little did it become the saints at Gilgal, when thinking that death had seized upon them, to utter such a cry of horror! There are other occasions, when such an outcry would be quite in its place. Where a system of wisdom desires to recommend itself to us, without coming with the blood of atonement; where a path to heaven is taught us, which passes by Calvary; where a

theology seeks to establish its pretensions, which is without Christ, without a priesthood, and without a sacrifice, whether it be on the book-mart, or from the pulpit, hidden behind an evangelical mask, or with open vizor, and in shameless nakedness; there we ought to shrink back with horror and exclaim, "There is death in the pot." Poisoned dishes are then really served up, *coloquintida* plucked from the beds of the great destroyer of souls; and he who suffers himself to be induced to eat of it, swallows down eternal death into his bones; against which no remedy can be found. No table is more amply provided in the present day, than the table of literature; in no kitchen are the cooks so busy as in that department. How much it is to be regretted that this kitchen is become, in a great measure, the devil's laboratory! Let us beware of the neatly trimmed wares which proceed from it, even when they bear the symbol of the cross or the chalice. "Death in the pot" might be inscribed upon whole libraries, and the same inscription, alas! might justly be placed over the doors of many schools and churches.

III.

Let us return to Gilgal. The state of the children of the prophets is certainly desperate. They were in want; they trusted in Him, who feeds the young ravens; they exulted at their happy discovery; but when about, with grateful hearts, to partake of that which they had found, it proves to be destructive poison,—“Death in the pot!” In what a light did God all at once appear to them, who suffered them to make such a mistake, and the prophet, who had been the immediate occasion of this baneful meal! Must not the poor people have, at the first moment, imagined themselves cunningly deceived, and be reminded of

the words of the Lord, by the prophet Hosea : " I will be unto them as a lion, as a leopard by the way will I observe them." The danger which then impended over their faith, must be regarded as incomparably greater, than that which menaced their lives. In eating the pernicious food, they swallowed the germ of death to their child-like confidence in the Lord. The star of eternal fidelity, the only consolation which was left them, began to envelop itself in dark clouds, before their eyes. The God of their hope was about to die, as it regarded them; and it was this death, more than any other, which forced from them the anxious cry.

Jehovah, however, had kind and faithful intentions towards them. The extremely painful situation in which they were placed, was only destined to be a foil, to set off the more gloriously his delivering mercy. The more furious the storm, the more pleasing the sunshine which succeeds it. The more intricate the affair, the more honourable to him, who is able brilliantly to extricate himself from it. The prophet has already received his instructions. God is willing to help. If any one rejoices at it, it is Elisha. His distress was not small, when the harmony of their friendly meeting was all at once so horribly interrupted by the unexpected cry of terror. But the storm of his feelings, instead of repelling him from God, only impelled him directly upwards. He poured out his terrified heart in ardent sighs to Him, who is able to deliver from death; nor did the Amen from on high delay. The brethren shall not die, but live; not be justified in their mistrust of God, but find occasion to condemn it with the profoundest confusion of face. How much to be regretted would it have been, if this only repository of the Divine light and life had been taken away out of the land! What

a loss for the world, what a triumph for Satan and his idolatrous adherents! Doubtless, the alarming cry, "There is death in the pot!" would have been replied to by hell with a loud cry of victory! But the powers of darkness often experience the vexation, that in the midst of the intoxication of joy, the trumpet of triumph bursts in their hands, and the acclamations of victory are choked in the utterance; because in an instant the whole aspect of things is changed, and the supposed victory is manifested to be a total defeat. This is incessantly the case in their operations against the children of God. Triumphant, they succumb; whilst the former in succumbing, conquer.

Elisha asks for a little meal. Who could have thought that such a trifling remedy would be able to destroy death and the triumph of hell! But the prophet orders it in the name of the Lord. And what power does not the most inconsiderable means acquire, when connected with the Word of God! A dish of salt is then sufficient to remove from a whole district, the desolation of a thousand years. A splinter of wood then makes the bitter fountains of Marah, sweet and potable. A little clay made with spittle, restores sight to a man born blind, and a drop of oil brings health to the dying. The healing power of every medicine depends upon one ingredient, which must not be wanting; and that is the blessing of God. Without the latter, the most deeply-studied prescription is unavailing. But if the Word be added to it, the substratum is of little importance. A vessel filled with clear water, then performs the same service as the most costly mixture, and the most spicy pill.

The children of the prophets did not stumble at the trifling nature of the remedy requested by Elisha. They knew that it was God's method to make inferior things the

vehicles of his miraculous power. He that despises that which is inconsiderable, is not fit for the kingdom of God, the King and Mediator of which is crowned with thorns; where blood is the propitiation; where fishermen and publicans appear as the officers and interpreters of the Supreme Majesty; and where a mere word, devoid of every rhetorical adornment, professes to be the voice of Jehovah. The brethren soon return with the meal which had been desired. You have yourselves experienced in a spiritual manner, what a little baked flour can effect, as soon as it is mingled with a word of God. How frequently has it expelled death from your hearts, the cataract from your eyes, lameness from your feet, and stupor from your frame! How often when partaking of it, have you eaten angels' food, felt celestial peace descend like a refreshing dew upon your hearts, and were afterwards enabled to walk, in the strength of that food, through the roughest and most thorny paths, joyfully, and with heads erect! I am speaking of the bread, which the Lord breaks to us at his table, and which is significantly called "the communion of the body of Christ." Certainly, the bread itself does not produce the effect; but it is the Word which is attached to it, that transforms it into miraculous food, and elevates the earthly element to a Divine and confirming pledge of the eternal blessings of the covenant.

Elisha takes the meal, and casts it into the pot, without any pomp or ceremony, but full of strong confidence in Him, who is equally able to help by small things as by great. He then orders his attendant to pour out to the people that they may eat. The disciples feel no more hesitation, but eat of it in good faith. Faith, however, is never put to shame; it is crowned. The angel of the

covenant indeed dislocated Jacob's thigh; but not his arms, by which he held him fast and clung round his neck. It is only put to shame, when based upon the individual's own strength; he that believes, shall see the glory of God. And when the brethren ate of it, the narrative informs us, "there was no harm in the pot." The pottage was savoury and wholesome, and whatever they had swallowed of a poisonous nature, had lost its baneful quality. Thus a handful of meal was a sufficient means in the Almighty's hand, to break the power of death, to destroy the triumph of hell, and to preserve to the world its salt, and to Himself his little Church on the earth. Let no one ever be dismayed, who knows that such a God is on his side. He is a living God, who does as he pleases with the powers both of heaven and earth. Nothing in the world has an absolute power. Who will say with certainty, "This shall produce one thing, and that another." Everything works in each individual case what it ought. God has reserved to himself more than the idle office of the overseer of the things which he has made; he interferes in a free and effectual manner, and changes laws, powers, and qualities, at his pleasure.

Thus that which was subsequently expressly promised to the believers in the name of Christ, was experienced by the saints at Gilgal. "If they drink any deadly thing," said the Saviour, "it shall not hurt them." How many thousand times may these words have been verified in the world! In a spiritual sense, they are unconditionally fulfilled in all the children of God. For them there is nothing any longer destructive, baneful, or soul-slaying. Even where a thing is all this, according to its nature, yet for Christians, a miraculous antidote is deposited in it, a bless-

ing from on high; so that not only is there nothing that can injure him, but all must work together for his good. How many a one occasions himself eternal death from this or that particular book, system, or error! Pour it out before a Christian, and there is no longer any harm in the pot. Every temptation, ordeal, or deception, terminates in such a manner, that he is not only able to bear it, but is even constrained to bless and praise God on account of it. Sin is the most destructive poison in the world, more so than hemlock or colocintida; but even this is deprived of its deadly power in the members of Christ. Nay, it must even become a salutary medicine to them; to one, a sight-restoring clay on the blindness of his eyes; to another, a means of humiliation; to a third, a drop of nourishing oil in the expiring flame of his joy in Christ, or to whatever other purpose it may serve him. It must of necessity be subordinate, and prove beneficial to them.

O blissful security of the children of God, against which every arrow is blunt, every sword is notched; who play without danger on the hole of the asp, and put their hands unhurt on the den of the cockatrice! And that which seeks their injury or destruction, promotes their salvation against its will. The wicked world is to them only as the abode of the grinder, the refiner, and the polisher. Even the devil performs for them only the office of an apprentice in the dispensary of the great Physician, in which he prepares salutary powders, and concocts beneficial mixtures. All that is in the world has received orders to serve these little ones. Everything spins itself into a miraculous thread, which necessarily connects them only the more closely with the source of their felicity. And yet these characters, thus environed with protection, are willing to

cherish anxiety, and suffer their hearts to be oppressed by any cause whatever? O that they might blush at such deportment! Lift up your heads therefore, ye who are dear to God as the apple of his eye! Bid adieu to care! Whatever occurs to you in the world, there is for you no harm in the pot. Grace mingles itself with every thing, and renders it salutary. Amen.

VIII.

THE MAN OF BAAL-SHALISHA.

LUTHER having one day received some mournful intelligence, observed, "The Gospel brings glad tidings, and they are certainly true. But in other respects, I know of little that is good or new in this miserable world." The man of God might well express himself thus; for such is really the case.

But what is the best news which the Gospel brings to sinners? It is that sinners are justified in the sight of God. That God has his balances in heaven, in which he weighs mankind, is beyond a doubt. Justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne. You know also the appalling characters which the invisible hand wrote on the wall, concerning the king of Babylon, in Dan. v. 27, and which are written in the life of every one who is out of Christ, whether he is able to read and interpret them or not—I mean the appalling words, "Thou art weighed in the balances, and found wanting."

Yes, whoever thou art, thou wilt eventually be placed in the balances of eternal justice. What will then be the result? The weight which is laid against thee, is the law with its demands and its curses. Thou art placed in the other scale; and now to the test. Thou hast all thy good works with thee; but the scale in which lies the law is not even moved by them, much less raised. Thou art permitted to increase thy weight with thy resolutions and thy vows; but they are like the dust of the balance. And even if thou hadst added thousands of alms to thy weight,

and possessedst a righteousness which is admired by a whole world, O, it would be only like the foam of the ocean, and the spider's web. It would not weigh a grain, how then should it be able to poise and elevate the heavy weight of the law? And wherewith wilt thou counter-balance the weight of punishment, which thou hast deserved by thy sins? Dost thou think that the handful of sufferings which thou hast endured in the world, stands about at par with the curse thou hast drawn down upon thyself? I pray thee, reflect, that the punishment with which thou art menaced, is endless damnation; how then canst thou have endured it already by a little earthly inconvenience during the present life? If thou art also placed in the balances of the sanctuary, as one who is separated from Christ, the result is no longer dubious. The word Tekel—weighed and found wanting—shall no longer be written with the sceptre of righteousness as a warning for thee on the wall, but branded on thy forehead, as a sign of thy perdition; and thou be cast howling down into the fiery gulph, amidst the triumphant shouts of mocking devils.

Who then will possess the requisite weight in the awful scales? He only, who possesses Christ, and is become one with him. A mighty addition is made to his scale, which is nothing less than the merits of Christ, as if they were his own. The atoning blood of Christ outweighs the curse, which man had drawn down upon himself, and the obedience of Christ, the demands which man ought to have fulfilled. O wondrous sight! the scale of the law mounts upwards like a feather; and that of the sinner sinks! The sinner has more than the requisite weight. The angels and the spirits of the just made perfect see it, and exult over the new fellow-citizen of the eternal kingdom.

Christ's obedience unto death is therefore of incalculable worth; this is evident if you behold the Surety himself. That obedience elevated him to the throne of glory. All the glory and bliss of heaven was connected with it as the reward of the Father. If this obedience therefore belongs to us, how can it weigh less than it did for him? It translates us also into unspeakable riches. But the first and most considerable treasure which it procures us, is, the heart, the love of God, that paternal affection which cares and provides all.

It is consolatory and encouraging to contemplate the governance of this love in the circle of its children. The present occasion affords us a desirable opportunity of doing so. Certainly, the paths of this love are often wonderful, and enveloped in the shades of night; but as a divine seer observes, "On all the glory shall be a covering."

2 KINGS IV. 42—44.

"And there came a man from Baal-shalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the first-fruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof. And he said, Give unto the people, that they may eat.

"And his servitor said, What, should I set this before an hundred men? He said again, Give the people, that they may eat: for thus saith the Lord, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof.

"So he set it before them, and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the Lord."

The typical nature of Elisha's person, life, and times presents itself to us in an increasingly prominent manner, and we are ever the less liable to mistake its New Testament impress. The subject of our present discourse also reminds us strongly of a similar one in the Gospel. It is

not indeed so stupendous as the latter ; since in comparison with it, it is only like a gentle prelude to the complete symphony, or as a single ear of corn compared with the contents of a whole sheaf. But the single stalk bears also its precious fruit. If we rub the ear with caution, we shall certainly be rewarded for our trouble, and carry home with us many a grain of wheat, full of abundant consolation. **THE MAN WITH THE LOAVES, ELISHA'S COMMANDS, and GEHAZI'S CONFUSION,** are the titles of the three divisions of our subject.

I.

We find ourselves this day again in the same place, and in the same society, which we left at the close of our last meditation. We are at Gilgal in the circle of the sons of the prophets, who are still in distressing circumstances. Hitherto, the Lord had certainly helped them. The distress presented itself daily ; and daily also a glorious deliverance. In the morning, sighing and crying ; in the evening, thankfulness and rejoicing. But still they had received no other assurance of security against new perplexities, than that which faith afforded them. The food dispensed to them, served only for a single repast. The Lord dieted them, so to speak, and provided for them by single dishes, and not by sacks or baskets full. Every day therefore brought its care ; but when their table was again covered, they were the more certain who it was that covered it, and the bread tasted only the sweeter and more savoury. At length it became apparent to them, that God had accepted them, not only as servants, but as children, and would provide them with food during the whole of their lives, both for body and soul. They looked more confidently into their empty cupboards, and saw hunger

approach with less anxiety ; for they learnt to believe in the existence of a store, which though they could neither see it with their eyes, nor touch it with their hands, was nevertheless in reserve for them.

We find them to-day again in distress. The last morsel is consumed, and there is no prospect of any further supply. They would gladly have eaten, but were obliged to be content to fast. The dinner-hour is past. The prophet is eyed with inquisitive looks, to ascertain whether his countenance expresses any good tidings. The prophet seems quiet, and as if he did not think about eating or drinking. The idea then occurs to one and another, "When will this state of wretchedness reach its termination ! We have escaped being poisoned, in order now to die of hunger !" In another place, they look so mournful and displeased, as if the bitter inquiry were upon their tongues, whether it was worth the while to trust in God. But what shall we say to these dejected individuals ? Let us justify them for once in their timidity. We reply, "No, it is not worth the while to hope in the Lord." We say, "He did not spare even his own Son, but freely gave him up for us all ; but he has not bread for you." We tell them, that the Lord provides for the young ravens, lest they should die of hunger ; but it is doubtful whether he will not leave you to pine away, to whom he has given his heart and his heaven. He has with tender affection numbered the hairs of your head ; but whether he knows of your necessities or troubles himself about your distress, is a matter of doubt ! And this would be the best manner of disposing of such-like naughty children, who although they are of infinitely more value than anything under heaven, can notwithstanding act as if they could not confide in the God of the birds of the air, and of the lilies of the field. Such a mode of

procedure towards them might be the best means of bringing them to feel the extreme folly of their want of faith, of duly reproving their unbecoming despondency, of compelling them to smile at themselves, and of rapidly fanning the expiring spark of their confidence again into a blazing flame.

We are impatient and arrogant people, who always desire to see the aid before we need it, and instead of being satisfied with our daily portion, insist upon the Lord's paying in advance, and giving us, for instance, boldness at the thought of death, before we come to die; courage for the conflict, before the standards are unfurled; the spirit of the martyrs, before the pile is kindled; and bread and money, whilst the stomach is still digesting, and before actual necessity recurs. "But," you say, "at Gilgal they are already in want." Not yet, my friends; they will still be able to endure for an hour or two. "But then," O the Lord will provide! If you doubt of it, come and see. The hours we have alluded to are elapsed. What occurs? A knocking is heard, and on opening the gate, a stranger enters, a man from the country, who with a full bundle in his hand, inquires for the man of God. "He whom thou seekest, is here," says Elisha, and kindly offers his hand to the unknown stranger; and after he had made the inquiries he wished, the stranger begins with reverential mien, to unloose the clean white cloth, and twenty loaves of bread, baked from the flour of the first-fruits of the new harvest, roll upon the table, and with them several handfuls of fresh bruised grain, which were wont to be roasted and afterwards eaten. "I thought myself under obligation to bring this trifling present," says the pious husbandman to the prophet, "for according to the law, it belongs to the Lord and his priests. But thou knowest, that our

tribes are no longer permitted to go up to the temple at Jerusalem; I therefore bring thee these first-fruits, and believe, that in so doing, I have equally consecrated them to Jehovah." Thus spoke the stranger. Meanwhile, the sons of the prophets gather round him, and blush with confusion, and look at each other with astonishment, and scarcely venture to lift up their eyes for shame, at desponding in such a manner, and are scarcely able to give utterance to their feelings at this renewed proof of the parental faithfulness of God. But such shame and astonishment is to be met with everywhere, and is always the end of care in the habitations of the righteous.

Occurrences like this at Gilgal are not unfrequent in Zion. How many amongst you have experienced similar and still more surprising aid. Many such-like instances of help, which have occurred in the midst of you, have been related to you from this pulpit, so that we almost hesitate to bring before you anything of the kind, from fear lest we should be relating only what ~~is~~ of daily occurrence. Let me, however, add one more to the number of those with which you are already acquainted; which though it contains nothing very striking, is nevertheless worthy of a slight attention, because it presents us a view of that God, who is great even in little things.

It was on last Christmas-eve, that a pious mechanic stood before his apprentice, and said, "To-morrow we shall again sing, 'Unto us a child is born,' &c. But we have not a morsel to eat, either for to-morrow or the day after. Thou knowest, that I have finished the things required by Mr. M. They are at the silversmith's, in order to be mounted with silver. Go and see whether they are ready. I fear, that in consequence of having much work on hand, he has not been able to think of them. But what

will be the result? If the gentleman does not receive to-day the things he has ordered, thou knowest we shall have reproaches enough, but not a farthing of money. Hunger, however, is a poor guest at such seasons." The boy ran to the silversmith's. "It will be in vain," thinks his master, "he will not return with it." But whilst thinking thus, his soul claps the wings of its faith, soars above the clouds of care, and says, "Whether he brings it with him or not, thou, O Lord Jesus! art able to help." Scarcely had the ejaculation joyfully issued from his breast, when the door opened, and the gentleman entered, who had ordered the articles. "Well, are the things ready?" asked he. "Yes, answered the terrified man, but perhaps not yet plated; the boy is just gone to inquire." "If he brings them," continued the former, "send them to me; but if not, take care that I receive them immediately after the holydays; and here is the money for them beforehand." With these words, he laid two dollars upon the table, and went away. Scarcely had he left the house, than the boy came creeping back with a disturbed countenance, "Master," said he, "we may starve; for the goods are not yet plated." "I am sorry for that," replied his master, "but look here; what seest thou?" "A paper," said the boy. "But what is there under it?" continued his master with a smile, whilst removing the paper; when lo! the two dollars were seen glittering on the table. "Master, where do these come from?" exclaimed the astonished apprentice. "Where else," replied the former, "but from Him who rules above." He then stated the circumstance as it had occurred, and added, "What dost thou think? does our faithful God still live, or is he perhaps no more? See, he knows very well where poor James resides." "Poor James?" you say. Yes, my

friends, this happened last Christmas, to the same James, who only a fortnight ago, shook off the dust of the earth from his feet, and has no longer any need of preparing articles in order to spend his Christmas in undisturbed enjoyment.

I could also relate many a similar occurrence to you, which has taken place in the midst of us, and something, which has only very recently occurred. For was it not a remarkable circumstance with the letter last week, in which it was said, "I know not how it is; but I have been compelled to send you this dollar. I had great need of it myself, and yet dare not retain it. Here then you have it, if it must be so." And how opportunely did this dollar come! But let these suffice; I should never reach the end, were we to relate everything which we know respecting things of this nature.

"From whence do you come?" said a celebrated professor, lately, to a candidate for the ministry, who came to visit him; and on his replying that he had been, amongst other places, in Wupperthal, the professor interrupted him with a sarcastic smile, saying, "You have been therefore in the valley, where so many little tales are told." O we thank God that our valley is not so poor in such-like tales, as is probably the life of that professor, and the events we experience will eventually become historical facts of greater importance, than all the narratives of war and victory, which this world can produce. For what are they else than fragments of the glorious history of Jehovah's affectionate intercourse with his people, and brilliant instances of his condescension, power, and faithfulness?

We believe in a living God and experience him as such. The God of the Rationalists is a machine-maker, who after having arranged his wheels, only reserves to himself the

power of looking at them, and not of interfering with or overruling them. They let heaven, fate, and nature indeed do this thing or that ; but God himself is placed in a state of quiescence. O most comfortless and absurd of all ideas ! How much more cheerfully does the light of the Holy Scriptures shine, which points out to us a God, who is all life and activity, and who upholds all things by the word of his power. According to the Scriptures, there is not a lily which perfumes the air, but the Lord clothes it. Not a bird finds its food, but it is God who feeds the little singer. According to the Scriptures, God is a mighty housekeeper ; the eyes of all wait upon him, and he giveth to each his food in due season ; a majestic fire-maker, who not merely created the sun and stars, but who also daily leads them forth as a flock, and preserves them alight ; a careful watcher, whom the tender herb, which he bedews in the night, never finds sleeping nor slumbering, much less the son of immortality, who was created for eternity ; a faithful protector, who at the proper time, whispers to the little hearts of the crane and the swallow, saying, “ Remove from hence ! ” and saves the young ravens from dying of hunger. He is the mover of all things, and performs a hymn of praise to himself on the strings of the storm and the thunder ; the quickener of all the living, without whose secret co-operation, bread affords no nourishment, drink no refreshment, medicine no relief, and to whose continual personal influence alone we owe it, that our lungs still respire, that our hearts beat, that our hands move, and our understanding can reflect. Nay, the Scriptures give us such an idea of God’s governance, that we are constrained to imagine, that if he for a moment ceased to operate, all that is would immediately sink back into chaotic confusion, and life be swallowed up by an all-de-

stroying death, and that which is, by absolute nothingness. And this idea of the relation in which God stands to the creature must be correct, because it is God himself who thus presents himself to our view in his word. He is the life of all that exists ; he is the support of the worm in the dust, as well as of the seraph before his throne, of men upon earth, and even of devils in hell. All things exist by him from one moment to another. And even as the living one in heaven sustains and upholds everything, so he also influences, guides, and governs all things, by whatever name they may be called. His government extends even to the words of thy mouth. Solomon says, "The preparation of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue are both from the Lord." He points out thy path. "A man's heart," says the same wise man, "deviseth his way ; but the Lord directeth his steps." His majestic throne is erected in the emotions of thy inmost soul. "The king's heart," asserts Solomon, "is in the hand of the Lord, and he turneth it as the rivers of water." Nay, thou canst not undertake anything, over which his control does not extend. "I know, O Lord," exclaims the prophet, "that the way of man is not in himself, and that it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." Laban, when enraged against Jacob, and seeking his life, is forcibly constrained to act gently towards him, is disarmed in a moment, and obliged mildly to say, "It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt ; but the God of your father spake unto me yesterday-night, saying, Take thou heed, that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad." Esau took the field in anger against his brother, but before they met, the sacred historian relates, that Esau ran to meet him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him, and they wept. Balaam wishes to curse Israel ; he does violence to himself in order to

effect his purpose ; but the very moment, when he is opening his mouth, he is inwardly compelled to bless the people, and announce prosperity to them. Saul, when standing at length opposite to David his mortal foe, is suddenly changed from a wild tiger into a gentle dove, and instead of vomiting fire and flames against him, he says, "Is this thy voice my son David?" and assures him, how far he was from doing him any injury. It is thus that the Lord's hand interferes in the most secret machinery of the human mind ; it is thus that he rules even there, as always in the most unlimited manner, according to the counsel of his own will.

Consoling truth ! yet only so for his people. What does it avail the devils and the damned to know that they are under the government of Eternal Majesty ? His children alone are able to rejoice, that Jehovah is a living God ; and O, with how much reason ! For to them Divine Providence is every thing that is lovely. It is to them a tender mother, which gives itself so entirely up to them, that they sleep on its bosom, breathe in its arms, proceed on their way, holding by its hand ; and can never be a moment removed from the protection of its wings. It is a friendly provider that spreads their table, that they may not suffer hunger ; that pledges its own honour, not to suffer them to want any good thing ; that conjures its foster-children in the most urgent manner, to cast all their care upon it, since though a woman may forget her suckling, yet they shall never be forgotten. It is a keeper to them, incomparably faithful and watchful ; a brazen wall around them ; a shield, which well protects them. And well may it be so ; since it is omnipotent and omnipresent ; since it puts its bridle on Satan and all the infernal host ; and since its voice breaketh the cedars like bulrushes, and

scattereth flames of fire. It is a preparer of medicine for them, which is able to draw remedies from every blade of grass on the soil of their lives, and even to extract the most salutary juices from the poisonous plant. It is a comforter, which ever speaks to him that is weary, at the proper time, and mingles every pain with the manna of its sweet visitations. And even as it is an unwearied companion, which every moment walks by the side of those who yield themselves to it, so it likewise precedes them a day or more on the way, and rules, not merely over the present moment, but also over what awaits them, and so arranges every thing, as in its kindness it perceives to be good and beneficial, and cautiously weighs out to them their portion of joy and woe for their restoration; and no mother on earth can have more affectionate, kind, and faithful intentions towards her offspring, than Divine Providence towards its children.

II.

The man of Baal-shalisha has taken his seat amongst the sons of the prophets, who were ready to have spread silken cushions for him, so heartily welcome was he to them. And that not merely on account of the gift which he brought, but still more so on account of the joyful signification of the gift, which, as the first-fruits of a new harvest, was a promising sign, that Jehovah would again cause his friendly countenance to shine on the severely stricken land. The man came with loaves to Gilgal, even as Joshua and Caleb, in ancient times, with grapes from Eshcol into the Israelitish camp; nay, even as the dove with the olive-leaf to Noah in the ark; and new and less clouded prospects unfolded themselves, on his appearance, to the troubled sight of the suffering sons of the prophets.

Thus, we again breathe more freely and hopefully, when, in this season of spiritual languishment and barrenness, we occasionally meet with a man whose faith is truly healthy, vigorous, and cheerful. In the animated confidence of such an individual, we find a tangible proof that heaven does not yet restrain its gracious and miraculous showers; we think we perceive in such a one, the first-fruits of a more universal pentecostal outpouring; we imagine that the longed-for hour of such a revival may shortly arrive for the whole Church; and whilst cherishing such conceptions, we experience a superior elevation of mind, and lovely stars of hope beam upon the grey horizon of our sorrowful existence. No, we do not despise the day of small things. A miner, when he has discovered though only an atom of gold in the shaft of a mine, regards it as a happy omen, and is joyful in hope. "I shall probably find still more," is his cheerful exclamation, and our feelings are the same, on similar occasions, in the kingdom of God. The intelligence of a single instance of thorough conversion in the heathen world, fills us with great joy, because we read in it the secret characters of prophecy, and infer, from the first solitary ray of the morning, the coming of the perfect day. A single Jew, whom we behold faithfully swearing to the banner of the cross, causes us to regard the whole people in a more glowing light of hope, and the regeneration of one of them is like a fresh breeze, which re-awakens the slumbering tones in the harp-strings of ages past, and causes them to resound more loudly, and with greater fulness and animation.

The twenty barley loaves lie on the table at Gilgal. With what pleasure the little ones look at them, and then how affectionately and kindly they regard the giver, as if they were ready to kiss his hands, and to say many things

to him, if they dared, and were not too timid! And even the adults freely confess that they have not seen such beautiful, white, and well-baked loaves at Gilgal for a long time; and some even suppose that such bread as this had never before been served up to them. It was not, indeed, bread from the table where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob sit; although it seemed to them more like bread from thence than the common bread of this world. The loaves were not particularly large nor heavy. The children alone would have sufficed to have consumed them, and this circumstance was the only one to be regretted in the affair; nay, one or another might even secretly think, "After all, this is not enough! If God is willing to help us, why does he do it only by halves, and not previously count the heads, and dispense to us accordingly?" Such is our presumption; we are the people who are never satisfied, whom the Lord finds it difficult to please, and we incline to nothing so little as to the suspending of our judgment upon the Divine procedure, until the period when he himself has finished his work. If what we wish does not immediately lie before us in full sufficiency, the power, liberality, and faithfulness of God are immediately suspected. But when he afterwards removes more of the covering from the gifts he has intended for us, we are then indeed, confounded, and are ready to strike ourselves in the face, on account of our suspicious and arrogant deportment.

Elisha looks at the loaves. "Yes," thinks he, "the Lord has given them. For what purpose? In order to feed his people. He has placed them in my hand, that I may satisfy the hungry with them. But will they suffice for more than a hundred mouths? Will they satisfy the existing necessity? *They must.* The householder is omnipotent. The quantity of the food is of no consequence.

The nourishment in the food is his blessing. It is not the strength of the bread which is here to be experienced, but his who sends the bread." Thoughts of this nature cheered the mind and excited the faith of the prophet. He would have thought it a sin, first to have counted the heads, and have divided the food accordingly. Magnanimously, and acting in the sense of the Divine householder, he says to his attendant, "Rise up, take what is lying before thee, and give to the people that they may eat!" This was the language of faith, uttered duly in God's name, and, in reality, in God's stead.

The circumstance involuntarily reminds me of the late Rev. Mr. Henke, who, as you know, did something similar, on one occasion, to that which Elisha did at Gilgal. A Christian friend came one day to the man of God, who unhesitatingly invited him to dine with him, although he knew not what he could set before him. When the bell rang at noon, the servant passed through the room several times, with an anxious countenance, in order unobservedly to beckon her master out. Henke, however, was not at all aware of her intention, but only reminded her, that it was time to lay the cloth. The servant was perplexed and went, but immediately returned, and requested her master to step out to her for a moment: "Sir," said she, with a mournful voice, "you wish me to lay the cloth? Don't you know we have scarcely a piece of dry bread in the house, and you sent your last penny, as you said, to a sick person to-day!" "Ah!" rejoined Henke with a smile, "is that all you have to say to me? Do but lay the cloth as usual. It will be time enough for the meat when we sit down to the table." The maid, not a little astonished, does as she is commanded. The table is spread; dishes, plates, spoons, and forks are duly placed,

and even the salts are not forgotten. "Let us take our seats," said the friendly host, with a cheerful countenance. They sit down to the empty table, and the worthy child-like man offers up a prayer, in which mention is made of the birds of the air, the young ravens, and many other things. And on his saying "Amen!" the bell is rung at the door. The servant hastens out, and what presents itself? A basket, with an abundance of food. A neighbour had felt constrained to send it to Mr. Henke. Calmly, and as if nothing particularly uncommon had occurred, Henke ordered all the dishes to be placed upon the table; he then looked smilingly at the astonished housekeeper, and said, "Well, have you still any thing to object to our kind entertainer?" What think ye, my friends, did he show himself in this instance to be much less than an Elisha? O, these are valuable facts; but such-like things cannot be imitated. It is certainly easy to order the cloth to be laid; but nothing is accomplished by that alone. Think of Gehazi, with Elisha's staff, at Shunem. However, if thou possessest any thing of Henke's or Elisha's faith, then do not hesitate to order the cloth to be laid. A royal host will provide the entertainment.

III.

"Give unto the people, that they may eat!" says Elisha to his attendant. Gehazi regards his master with a look of surprise, as if he would say, "You certainly do not mean it!" He counts the heads. There are a hundred men, without women or children, and what a hungry people! Ten of them would scarcely be satisfied with the twenty loaves. "Master," says the doubting youth, "shall I set this before a hundred men?" And says it in a tone, and with a look, as if he would intimate to the prophet,

that for once he had spoken dreaming, and had really commanded something absurd. The foolish youth! to look at the affair in such a natural manner, and to wish to measure the order of the man of God, by a common human standard! The lad with his scruples, appears to me almost like one, who sees a cannon charged, and weighing the ball in his hand, tries how far he can throw it, and says, "The ball will not reach the rampart yonder, much less be able to destroy it." "Ignorant fool," would the experienced warrior reply, "knowest thou not, that it is not a weak human hand, but the power of fire, which is to throw the ball." In the same way, we might ask Gehazi and say, "Foolish boy, art thou ignorant what it is that gives emphasis and impetus to thy master's command? There is a faith concealed behind the latter, which removes mountains; a confidence in God's promises, which overcomes the Almighty; an incitement of the Holy Spirit, nay, the omnipotent God himself, utters the command. How then can the people fail of being satisfied?" But the youth has no idea of this; he regards the injunction, "Give to the people, that they may eat," no otherwise than as if he, or some one like himself, had uttered the words. It never once enters his mind, that such a command in the mouth of Elisha is something essentially different; nay, that spoken in reliance upon a word of God, and in the name of God, it is omnipotent, and works Divine wonders. And how does the boy presume, speaking generally, to reason upon his master's order! It is for him to obey in silence. Let him distribute the food! Whether the people are sufficiently fed by it or not, is not his affair. Is it expected of him to work the miracle? His office is merely to wait upon the rest, and yet he acts as if the accomplishment of the miracle was expected from *his* weakness. But

how often do we act in the same manner? When the Lord said to his apostles, "Go, heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out devils;" how absurd it would have sounded, had the disciples replied, "O Lord, our art and science does not extend so far;" "Ye fools," would the master have rejoined, "do I expect such works from *your* ability? The commands of the Son of man are promises. What I tell to you, is only that which I intend to do through you." Many things are also enjoined upon us by the Lord; and what would be the result, were the accomplishment dependent upon our own power? We are called upon to overcome death, tread upon serpents and scorpions, resist the devil, lift up our heads in the great tribulation, never grow weary, nay, even to be holy, as God in heaven is holy, and many other great and mighty works are enjoined upon us. But what kind of an injunction is this? There are various opinions about it amongst believers; the different replies which are made to this question, are the bases of those two opposite states of mind, which we are accustomed to designate by the terms, legal and evangelical. Many understand this injunction as a naked command; the precious Gospel then suddenly disappears, and is again become an intolerable yoke, and a law which only brings toil and death. But we regard it, and that justly, as an injunction, like that just referred to, which was addressed to the apostles: "Heal the sick!" It is an injunction of promise; and the moment this idea is quickened in us, a flood of valour and courage, peace and joy, pours itself into our hearts, and we lift up our heads on high, we overcome the world, and death, and every foe.

Elisha, vexed at the unbecoming objection of his unbelieving attendant, repeats with still stronger emphasis, the command, "Give unto the people, that they may eat;"

and adds, "for thus saith the Lord, they shall eat, and shall leave thereof." The youth then abandons his own will, and begins the division. He breaks the loaves, and distributes them, and the bread is not all used. The people eat to their heart's content, and have as much as they desire. At length no one wishes for any more. All refuse, and are satisfied. And when the youth looks about him, who can describe his astonishment, on seeing that an abundance of bread is still lying on the table! "No," thinks Gehazi, "this is not according to the natural course of things!" But why not? It was not less natural, than the growth of a tree in the garden, or when eighty grains of corn proceed from a single one. Ought we not therefore to say, "The latter is not less wonderful than the former?" It is the same living and omnipotent God, who in both cases breathes forth his creating breath.

Let this narrative strengthen our faith, my brethren, even as it did that of the sons of the prophets. Let it do so in particular, in the case of those who languish under a variety of sorrows and distresses, and look forward with anxiety to the result. Ah, if you possess the Lord, my friends, divest yourselves of care! As true as he lives, he careth for you, whatever may be your necessities. Pay more attention to the mighty inferences, which the apostle, according to the rules of a blessed and infallible logic, draws for you in Rom. viii. 31—33, from still greater premises. He there breaks out into mighty exultation; joy intoxicates him, and threatens to burst his heart. In one look, he represents to himself everything that is given to a child of God in Christ; and this look translates him out of himself, and wings him in triumph above the high places of the earth. He sees all his enemies lying vanquished at his feet. He views himself clothed in a righte-

ousness, whose brightness dazzles even him. He finds himself in the possession of a fulness of gifts and blessings, which he is unable wholly to survey, and at the same time, protected and defended in such a manner, that he really knows not what else he has to do in the world, than to spend his breath in songs of victory and triumph.

From whence does the apostle derive this super-abundant, all overcoming confidence? Not from himself; he draws it from a source, which is also daily and hourly open unto us. This source is the miracle of the manger and the cross. His rapture streams forth from the love of God in Christ. Hear him speak: "What shall we say then to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son for our sakes, but freely gave him up for us all; how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth."

The Apostle speaks in the plural number. *We*—says he, and—*us*; and thus embraces in one bundle, himself and all his brethren according to the Spirit, and intends to say, that their unbelief is only to blame, and not their privileges, if they do not unanimously break out with him in strains of similar exultation. The first thing of which he boasts, is something incomparably great and glorious. He says, "God is for us." You perceive in this truth, Paul's entire power and glory; in it lies his fortress and his tower of defence. It is from thence he takes the standard, which he waves so boldly, and the sword with which he bravely marches against Satan and the whole infernal host. He encamps in this truth, like a young lion: who will venture to rise up against him? It is from its turrets that he valiantly exclaims, "Who is he that condemneth?" God is for us!—that is, he is on our side, he is inclined towards

us, he bears us on his heart. He graciously interests himself in our behalf; he embraces us with the whole of his love! O, this is indeed a truth, which may well cause us to exult and rejoice!

But is the matter thus? Can it really be, that a sinful worm, and a rebel, such as man, is permitted to boast of having God on his side? The apostle says, "Yes, he may;" and places under the mighty truth he had just uttered, a couple of proofs, by way of pillars, which have no need to fear that any hand will be able to shake them. He brings these proofs from Bethlehem and the place of a skull. He deduces the love of God, first of all, from the circumstance of his not having spared even his own Son; and secondly, from the fact, that he freely gave up his Son for sinners. And certainly the proof contained in this argument is irrefutable and overpowering.

He first shows us the Son, the only-begotten, who was the bliss of his Father in heaven, the dearest to him, and the object of his affection beyond any other in the whole creation. Yea, the Father's sole and entire love, because he beheld in him his own likeness, the reflection of his glory, and the express image of his person. And "this Son," says Paul, "the Father did not spare." What words are these! They remind us of Abraham on Mount Moriah; of the fatal pile, and the lifted knife; and it seems as if they were intended to remind us of it. The eternal God struggled against his own heart, did violence to his love, forcibly overcame the tenderness of his own breast, in order to part with his dearly-beloved Son from his bosom for a season, and send him to sojourn in the tearful vale of this sinful earth. There he lies, in a cold winter's night, upon hard straw, in a gloomy stable; clothed with our human nature, divested of all his glory,

exposed helpless to a thousand dangers, and even when a babe, not only mistaken merely by the whole world, but also an object of the most cruel hostility and the most furious persecution. Ah, why did God act thus ; He did so, in order to snatch, at such a price, a multitude of accursed firebrands from the flames of hell. For this purpose he let it cost him his darling Son, the delight of his eyes. Nay, Paul says too little, when he says “ God is for us ! ”—too little, when he elsewhere exclaims, “ But after that the kindness and love of God appeared.” There are no words in our poor human language, which worthily point out the greatness of the Divine love for sinners, which evidences itself in this unspeakable gift, in this not sparing of his own Son. A sun of compassion and grace shines upon us from the manger at Bethlehem, for the due praise of whose brightness, even angels’ harps are too weakly strung.

“ He gave up his own Son for us,” says the apostle, and thus points out the second proof of the love of God. We understand what Paul means. The word which he uses has an appalling signification. It intimates a complete putting away, a forsaking, and an offering up of the object. The same word is employed in Matt. x. 21. It is there said, “ The brother shall deliver up the brother *to death* ;” and it is in this sense that it is used in these words the being delivered up *for us*, means *in our stead*, and thus we see ourselves transferred from the manger to the cross. Yes, we behold with grief the boy in Mary’s lap ; for it is not long before the terrific cry shall thunder forth, “ Awake, O sword ! against my Shepherd, against the man that is my fellow ;” and even these are the words of his heavenly Father. O, if nothing else awaited the feet of this little babe, than to stand in the workshop of the

carpenter, and to be wearied by walking through the cottages of the poor and the needy, the sight would be tolerable. But they are destined to wade through the ocean of agony, that the waves in the sea may be smitten. And these little eyes are to weep tears of blood, and these gracious lips inquire of the Father, why he had *forsaken* him ; and these dear hands are to be nailed to the fatal tree, and this innocent heart to be racked with infernal torments. Ah, do we not feel inclined to throw ourselves upon the child, and cry, "Wound and pierce me, instead of this little lamb!" But if these are *our* feelings at the thought of the tortures which menace the Son of love, think what the infinitely loving heart of his Father must have felt ! and yet he gave him up. There was no other possible mode of deliverance for us. The dear child must of necessity appear in judgment for us, suffer the sentence of damnation for us, and endure chains, death, and the horrors of hell. Such is the road it trod. God gave up his own heart, that *we* might live. Now tell me, does God love sinners, or does he not ? You are silent, because you think a simple affirmative in answer to this question is too weak and insufficient. I am also silent and adore, and strike my hands together. O Love ! O abyss of mercy !

After the apostle has thus established and proved the position of the love of God to sinners, he draws inferences from it. And what inferences they are ! If there is nothing more irrefragable than they, there is also nothing more joyful or delightful. These consequences form a grave to all care, and replant a paradise for us in this vale of tears. The first of these mighty inferences results from the first proof of the Divine love. "He that spared not his own Son," says the apostle, "how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Very correctly argued ; no

objection can be brought against it; a child may comprehend it. If his love to me goes so far, that even that which was the most precious to him, was not too dear to prevent him from tearing it from his heart for my sake, it will also be sufficient to afford me that which is less valuable. But everything that can be mentioned, whether temporal or spiritual, is nothing when compared with that unspeakable gift. If I were to say, I possessed a piece of cloth which, though it was large enough to encompass a forest, was insufficient to cover me upon my bed, would you not laugh at me as insane, for making such a speech? Or, if I were to relate that I had a friend, who loved me so much, that he would any moment present me with a thousand dollars if I requested them—but whether he had a penny to spare for me was another question,—would you not, at such a speech, suspect me of having lost my senses? And yet, my brethren, you are accustomed to think and give utterance to such follies without ceasing. For what else is your language in reality than the following, “It is true, he has given me his Son, in the greatness of his mercy; but whether he will grant me food, clothing, and lodging, I know not; it is a matter of doubt.” O foolish and delusive idea! Shall the grace which throws its crown and its whole heaven into your lap, be sparing of the trifling sum which you require on your pilgrimage? I almost hesitate to enter upon the refutation of such absurd imaginations; because by so doing, I might excite the suspicion, that some cause really existed for such senseless ideas. O, do become wise at length, and consider what love that is, which bears you upon its hands! And as often as anything causes you apprehension, run straight to the manger at Bethlehem, look at the infant there, gaze upon the sun of love which shines upon you

from thence, and place before you the mighty question of the apostle, "He who spared not his own Son, but freely gave him up for us all: how" O, let angels, men, and devils say, let your united understandings say, "how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

The apostle draws a second inference from the love of God. He says, "God has so loved us, as to give his only begotten Son for us!" And hence he exclaims, as an inference, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." Another correct conclusion, and therefore entirely irrefragable. God so loved us, as to give up his own Son for us to the law, that he might fulfil it, and to the curse of the law, that he might endure it. The Son submitted to both; he perfectly fulfilled the law for us and bore the curse. Now, if I am one of those happy people for whom he gave up his Son, he will therefore judge me according to the merits of his Son. But if he does so, nothing can occur even to my latest breath, be it what it may, that can deprive me of the right to exclaim with joy, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" Yes, who? Shall Satan? He has no longer any access to the tribunal above. Shall angels? Here is a righteousness, before the brilliance of which their own must fade. Our brethren? We lament when they are obliged to accuse us; but they are also sent away. Shall conscience? What has the subaltern officer to do, when the supreme tribunal has already declared me guiltless? God is greater than my heart, and knows me only in Christ. Thus, in the course of the present week, another great accuser of our life must depart in disgrace, —a giant, who, alas! might bring a pile of bitter accusations against us before the tribunal of heaven. This accuser is the departing year. But what reception will he

also meet with? "Knowest thou not," it will be said to him, "that this debt is also liquidated?" And a millstone will be hung about his neck, and he, with his pile of documents, will be plunged into the depths of the sea of oblivion, whilst we are permitted to enter freely, frankly, and joyfully into the new year. "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth."

The Apostle deduces a third inference. "If God therefore be so for us," argues he, "as not to spare his only-begotten Son, but freely gave him up for us all, who can be against us?" Again how evident and conclusive! "Who?" says he, and looks gravely around him, as if he would make his inquiry of heaven, earth, and hell. He sees horrible visions. He sees the roaring lion, how with furious rage he roams about, and shows his teeth; he sees the horrible host of the powers of darkness, which have the dominion of the air; he perceives the world manifesting itself in a two-fold form, as a decoying harlot, and as an adder swollen with hatred to Christ. He sees a thousand things in the back-ground, snares, nets, necessities, and dangers. He perceives sin, that lurking foe, in his own heart, and a variety of other things that excite horror. But all these dreadful and appalling visions embarrass him so little, that, on the contrary, he triumphantly exposes his breast to them. "God is for me!" is his motto; and in this consciousness, he rides, as in a triumphal car, high above all the gloom of care, and exultingly exclaims from it, as from the lofty window of a secure and elevated fortress, "Who, who, who in heaven, on earth, or hell, can be against me!"

And what hinders us, my brethren, from breaking out into the same exultation, since it is certain that God has likewise given his Son to us. We thus rest in the lap of

the same love in which Paul reposed, and our position is like that of a warrior, between the ramparts of an impregnable citadel. We dwell within a fortress. The walls are fiery ! on the turrets hang the shields of conquered foes by thousands. The bulwarks are more firm than if formed of iron or brass. The keys to this Divine castle lie safely preserved above the clouds, in faithful hands, and the walls cannot possibly be stormed in any manner. David could speak from experience of this invisible fortress and its strength. He was blockaded in it by Saul with cavalry and infantry, and was shot at with lances and darts. Philistines and Canaanites besieged him in that fortification ; nay, he was assailed in it by angels and devils, by his own flesh, and the whole population of hell. His foes caused him uneasiness and terror in it ; but they were not able to destroy him. In the end he came out unconsumed, and was able to conclude his life, as he did his psalms, with a loud hallelujah and cry of victory. We dwell also in such a fortress. The love of God in Christ is our citadel. All the other Divine perfections place themselves like a barricade around us. It is not possible that anything can touch us, so as to injure and destroy. We may be terrified whilst in it, but not overcome ; besieged, but not captured. "We are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation," says the Scripture ; hence we exultingly exclaim, "If God be for us, who can be against us ?"

With these three mighty inferences, therefore, we proceed on our way. If we feel apprehensive with respect to temporal subsistence, we step back a moment, and rebuke the storm of the heart with the blissful thought, "He that spared not his own Son, but freely gave him up for us all, how shall he not with him also, freely give us all things."

If sin seeks to terrify us, whether past sins, or those that have recently accumulated against our will, we reflect in what relation God stands towards us. He has given up His Son for us. "Who will lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." If anxiety seizes us, at the sight of our foes, or at the clouds of tribulation, which rise in an increasingly threatening manner on the horizon of our existence, we smile from the height of our fortress at the clouds; we plant, even before the conflict, the banner of victory on the turrets of our castle, and repel every wave of care, anxiety, and terror with the third inference, the joyful motto, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Hallelujah, Amen.

IX.

NAAMAN.

THAT which troubles us the most in life is the anxiety we feel respecting what may occur on the morrow and the day after. Perambulate the cottages of the dejected and the oppressed, and you will in general perceive, that the cause of their anxiety is not an immediate necessity, but one which may be expected in the sequel. If the bitter fountain of their apprehensions could be stopped up, and a bright ray of hope be shed upon the foreground of their life—lamentation would be immediately turned into rejoicing, and a clear sun-shine, instead of gloomy and tempestuous clouds, surround their brow. Hence, there has ever been amongst mankind, a looking out for a sign, as a token for good, for a favourable prognostic respecting the future, and for something on which they might firmly establish the hope that no misfortune would befall them, but that on the contrary, blessings and benefits would attend them. Attention was directed to the constellations in the firmament; predictions were procured from oracles and the artifices of the priests; much was inferred from dreams and visions; and even birds that build their nests upon or under the roof, were obliged to act the part of Noah's dove with the olive-leaf. These things indeed have lost their credit in the present day; but the desire for favourable signs and propitious omens is not on that account by any means extinguished among mankind. How greatly are people inclined, for instance, on taking some

important step or undertaking in life, such as marriage, journeys, and the like, to spy out intimations in everything that occurs on such occasions. The smallest and most trifling circumstance is then frequently sufficient suddenly to call forth the most decided disturbance, and even to spread a mourning veil over a whole festival, as well as to excite the utmost joy in the minds of the people, and to complete their happiness, according as they think they perceive a good or evil omen in it.

There is, however, little dependance to be placed upon such auguries. And yet there is a blissful sign which never deceives. Let him to whom it is given, rejoice and cast all care away. But let no one deceive himself. The mark is not for every one. Is money or wealth the sign you mean? By no means? Remember the barn-builder. Is it honour and celebrity? This the bay-tree in the psalm possessed; yet in a short time, it stood withered by the way-side. Is it understanding or talent? Understanding is no security against distress and death, and the judgment of Divine wrath. Is the sign to be found in meritorious actions for the service of society? I tell you that these merits are of no avail before him, who can destroy both body and soul in hell. Nor is integrity the sign. It proves no defence where the holiness of God sits in judgment; and equally as little is religious knowledge the sign. Judas possessed it, and yet destruction followed at his heels. The sign, the propitious sign which we mean, is of a very different kind. It is that which is alluded to in Psalm lxxxvi. 17, where it is said, "Show me a token for good." It is not anything of an outward nature; it is in the individual. It may, however, be seen glimmering through him. No one has it by nature. Queen Grace must bestow it upon us. The sign is first of all, *a wound*.

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What, a wound? Yes, a wound in the heart. It is inflicted as the result of self-knowledge; and is a wound, which no plant, no balm from the field of this earth can heal. The publican had the sign, when he smote upon his breast. The malefactor had it, when he said, "Lord, remember me." Mary Magdalen had it, when she sat at the Master's feet, and washed them with her tears. Take it for granted also, that whoever prospered in time and eternity possessed it, and that those who had it, have also fared well, although we may not have witnessed it. The wound is, therefore, the consciousness of being a poor sinner? Yes, my brethren. The profound and contrite feeling that we are condemned in ourselves, and execrable in the sight of God, is the wound I mean. Certainly, an inconsiderable sign, but a sign of unspeakable value; a sign little attended to by the world, but the only one which betokens salvation. The Word of God is witness.

But this wound is not the entire sign. Something else is connected with it. The mark which the Lord caused to be set on the foreheads of the people, that they might escape destruction (Ezek. ix, 4,) "Set a mark upon them," says he to the angel—a Tau, the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, upon their foreheads. But this letter was in the form of a cross, as it is also still evident in the Greek and Latin T, which was formed after it. You now know, therefore, what is implied in the propitious sign. It is a cross—not painted upon the lip, not deposited in words, not portrayed in the idea, but deeply and vividly engraved and branded by the Holy Ghost upon the heart and the vitals; so that the individual regards the cross of Christ as the most pleasing object of vision in the horizon of heaven and earth, and his inmost love springs up from this bloody tree and firmly twines around it; and thus, on this

one nail, he hangs all his hope and all his salvation, and is constrained to say with Paul, "I am determined to know nothing, but Christ and him crucified." Now, where these two are found together—the wound and the cross—the poor sinner and faith in the Lamb—the broken heart, which at the same time rests firmly on the atoning sacrifice—there is the propitious sign; but only there, and nowhere else. It does not sparkle indeed, like the golden chains, the stars, and orders of this world; but how will the brightness of the latter eventually fade before that of the former! In the world indeed, no high value is put upon it, nor does it assume a rank in civil society; but the angels of God see this sign, and stand joyfully still, and reverentially salute him who wears it, and know that they are enjoined to minister to him. Thank God! there are probably many amongst us, who are decorated with this sign in the heart, although the mantle of infirmity may be wound around it. The sign attests their nobility, and proves their adoption. They have no need to inquire further respecting any other favourable omen. This single one—the wound and the cross—is a sufficient pledge to them, that it shall be well with them in time and eternity.

What is the beautiful portion of Elisha's life upon which we this day enter, but an actual comment upon the words of the Psalmist, "Show me a token for good." May an abundant blessing rest upon the consideration of it! The Lord graciously grant it!

2 KINGS v. 1, 2.

"Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable; because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour; but he was a leper.

“And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman’s wife.”

A new history is about to unfold before us its significant scenes; a history, which we should sooner look for on the pages of the New Testament, than in the books of the Old. Here, if any where, that which is typical in the life of Elisha, and has reference to New Testament times, presents itself very obviously to our view. Here that love operates in its most perfect development, which appeared, not to be ministered unto, but to minister. Here the fence, the party-wall between Israel and the Gentiles is already fallen down; nay, we even meet with here in lively representation, the baptism of the New Testament, and many other things beside, which are New Testamental, and remind us of the Gospel.

Our present meditation, which may serve as an introduction to the following discourses, will be directed towards making us better acquainted with the hero of the narrative; NAAMAN THE SYRIAN; and the instrument of his eternal salvation, a LITTLE ISRAELITISH MAID. May this acquaintance cause us real pleasure!

I.

The narrative carries us to Damascus. This very ancient metropolis and residence of the kings of Syria, situate in the midst of blooming gardens on a spacious plain, is the scene which first presents itself in the narrative. We therefore depart from the Holy Land, and cross over, for a time, into the death-like obscurity of the heathen world. Thick darkness prevails around us; one idol altar stands near another. There is no where, even the smallest

glimmer of untroubled light and the true knowledge of God amongst the degraded and grossly blinded population.

We might imagine ourselves separated from the land of Divine revelation, seers, and prophets, by oceans and boundless deserts, and yet it is only a ridge of hills, which divides us from Canaan. But a loftier partition-wall elsewhere elevates itself, in the national hatred, by which the Syrians, from ancient times, fortified themselves against the doctrines and manners of Israel, their hereditary foe. The pride of these heathens erected a barrier against the light of Judah, and impelled them to treat every spark of revelation which glittered upon their borders from that country, as contraband, and hastily to tread it out before the gates of the kingdom.

The Almighty, however, had purposed in his mercy to hurl the flambeau of his truth into the very heart of this palisadoed state, and to found, near the altars of lifeless idols, a new altar on which the name of Jehovah should beam. Where the Lord designs to shed his light, it is in vain to strive against it and close the windows. His command, "Let there be light!" strikes victoriously through every shade. His grace goes hand in hand with his omnipotence. He speaks, and it is done. Who shall resist his will?

God is not merely a God in heaven. He is also a God amongst mankind, and designs to be so. He desires to be acknowledged as a God, who dwells and rules in the midst of us, and, great in little things, has his overruling hand in everything. Hence it is less frequently the case, that he performs his gracious acts direct from his elevated habitation; but generally operates through a variety of human intermediate agents. He takes the path of coincidence, and disguises his royal government in a concur-

rence of various, apparently accidental and insignificant circumstances, which subsequently prove to be all of them of Divine arrangement; and thus presents us not only with his work, but also with himself, as the universal moving cause, the omnipresent and ever living God. In this manner also he acts in our narrative.

Benhadad sits upon the Syrian throne, a martial prince, and the same who, in Elijah's time, we beheld taking the field against Israel, and commanding in person in that bloody battle, in which Ahab, forsaken of God, fell pierced by an arrow, upon the fatal field. Amidst the brilliant circle of great men, by whom the throne of this mighty heathen potentate is surrounded, a man shines forth, whose superior talents and abilities had elevated him to the right hand of his king, and the fame of whose deeds had rendered him the idolized favourite of the whole nation. He bears a name which might correspond not less with his outward form, than with his official situation, which furnished ample reason for it. He is called Naaman—that is, the well-formed—the beautiful; a name which subsequently indeed could only be applied in the way of ridicule and irony! but only in order to regain soon after, in a far higher sense, its truth and suitability. For a while, the individual certainly presents himself to us only in the equivocal lustre of transient earthly greatness. A rich wreath of laurels gathered on the fields of achieved victories, surrounds his brow. Dazzling marks of favour and regard, with which royal hands have invested him, glitter on his breast. The public voice, with enthusiastic unanimity, distinguishes him as the most valiant hero and able general of his age; and his actions find in the music of patriotic and national songs, their lasting memorials. In other respects, Naaman is a heathen, born and brought up

in the idolatrous blindness of his people ; one who had often marched indeed into the land of Divine revelation, but had continued unaffected by its light. He had hitherto approached only in a hostile manner, the people through whom he afterwards received salvation ; like the senseless race of the present day, who in lamentable delusion can endure and tolerate everything, and accommodate themselves to all except that race, amongst whom, notwithstanding, the tree of their life also flourishes, and who, on account of their celestial possessions, are alone able essentially to serve them. But what a happy thing it is, that a man's salvation depends neither upon his own efforts nor his will, and that the performance is not a reward of his good-will, but that the latter is given us by God as an earnest of the accomplishment. How admirable a thing it is, that converting grace not only exerts itself in the way of allurements and invitation, but also with an overcoming power ; and not merely seeks, but makes its volunteers ! Who could be saved, if the case were otherwise ? Naaman is also destined to experience this constraining influence of Divine grace. That God, of whom he hitherto knows nothing, has great things in view with respect to him. He is able to attain his sacred purposes in him and through him, however little likelihood there may be for it, and notwithstanding the repelling causes which apparently exist. The Lord rules omnipotently both in the kingdom of nature, and in that of the human mind. He not only calls forth the stars in the firmament, but also ideas in our souls, and bids them come or go, remain or change. All hearts are in his hands. According to the inclination of his sceptre, the whole universe proceeds on its course in its mighty revolutions, as well as in the minor details of the ephemerons and the sons of the dust. In such a con-

nexion, the idea of the independent nations and individuals evaporates into empty air. But it can only tend to our greater tranquillity, not to be compelled to believe in the independence of the creature. On the idea that every living thing is held and moved by invisible threads, which rest in the hands of Omnipotence, depends the cheerfulness with which we can contemplate the world and all that is therein. What would become of the world, if the will of man guided the sceptre, and not the will of God?

On approaching Naaman, we find a dark cloud has enveloped his lustre. Although he may be as before, the dignified and laurel-crowned hero—yet he is no longer an object of envy. Ah, a bitter drop of wormwood has recently turned the wine of his joy into gall, and a cancer has eaten itself into the marrow of his glory, which at once ranks the man of dignity and good-fortune with those in the most pitiable condition on earth! Naaman is afflicted with the leprosy—that dreadful and disgusting disease, in which Israel beheld the representation of sin, that most horrible thing under heaven, and the healing of which the Lord stamped as the type of that which is most beautifying—the redemption by Christ. His body, from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, is one swelling; his skin, an ulcerating, lacerated, and inflamed bark of a tree. The sight of him is avoided, for it is disgusting and horrible. People flee when he approaches, for his atmosphere is poisonous, and his breath a pestiferous and fatal exhalation. The hero of the day is compelled to creep into a remote and gloomy chamber, and if he wishes to show himself openly, he is not permitted to do so otherwise than with his head covered, and exclaiming, “Unclean! Unclean!” and the people that meet him, quickly hasten away with averted looks from the victori-

ous general. And he that previously felt himself happy on receiving a transient salutation from this dignified individual, would now, if the hero were to offer him his hand in a friendly manner, hesitate greatly to accept it. Such are the circumstances into which the man is brought, who, but a short time before, was celebrated as the most fortunate amongst the fortunate ; and who in all the world was so miserable and poor, as to be willing to exchange with Naaman, and would not infinitely prefer being Naaman's servant to being Naaman himself?

Persons often think of others, that such a one sits in the lap of prosperity, and say, What a rich and respectable man he is! But alas! if they only knew what is frequently concealed behind such glory, envy would then be seldom felt. Thousands who seem to sit enthroned on the summit of prosperity, would just as gladly exchange with you, as you, who know not the reverse side of their life, would be to exchange with them. O how willingly would they rid themselves of their entire prosperity, could they with their roses, cast away also the sharp thorns which pierce them in secret ! Be satisfied with your condition, my brethren. However lowly it may be, it is not the glittering exterior which brings happiness. Cease to be envious. Seek supremely the peace of God ; this it is, which constitutes true felicity. This makes even a piece of dry bread into manna, and the cottage of clay into an outer court of Paradise.

II.

You may well suppose that no means were left untried for the preservation of such an important man as Naaman. The king, who regarded him as the chief support of his throne, sent him his most able physicians. The latter

vied with each other in faithful attention to their dignified patient; but no remedy proved availing, and their most zealous efforts continued ineffectual. In fact, there had been no instance of the removal of the unaccountable and obstinate disease of leprosy by means of medical treatment. We know from Scripture that it was a plague inflicted by God himself, and could only be healed by a miracle of Divine omnipotence. Diseases of this kind exist even to the present day, and are permitted in order to check the pride of the sons of earth; to re-conduct the art and wisdom of man into the bounds of becoming humility; to keep awake in us the consciousness of our entire dependence on him who is above; and to withdraw from us the delusive idea, that the preservation of our breath is a work of our own. What a mighty overthrow did the wisdom of this world recently experience from that dreadful disease which, more murderous than the destroying angel in Egypt, passed over a great part of the globe, from the East, and has not yet finished its circuit! We confess, that according to the new man, we can heartily rejoice at the defeat which science sustained by it; for the boasting of the extent of wisdom to which the present age had attained, knew neither measure nor bound. But they now begin to take in their full-blown sails a little. The arrogance of previous pretensions was made manifest in all its emptiness, and became the scorn of the people. Proud science, which had bloatedly assumed almost the throne of Deity itself, was obliged to be content to confess by the mouth of its most distinguished advocates, that it was unable to penetrate to the bottom of this mysterious evil. Haughty art, which gave itself the airs of a worker of miracles, to which all things were possible, suffered a lamentable shipwreck with its remedies and preservatives,

and, humbled and confounded, forsook the stage. The civil authorities no longer hesitate to recommend a believing confidence in God as the most approved remedy against this horrible complaint; and there is no longer any want of those, who restore to him the glory of which they had deprived him who says, "I am the Lord that healeth thee," and who join with David in saying, "In the Lord put I my trust; how say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountains?"

Naaman's disease was not intended as a deadly and poisonous potion from the cup of wrath, but as a salutary draught from the cup of mercy. God was gracious to this heathen, and loved him. Was it because the heathen first loved him? By no means. For what reason then? God desired to magnify his mercy in this man. This was the sole and exclusive reason. The Syrian was a valiant warrior. Uncommon wreaths of victory flourished upon his temples. But this was nothing in the esteem of Him, who "delighteth not in the strength of the horse; nor taketh pleasure in the legs of a man." And even had he possessed other qualities, which might be termed brilliant and amiable, yet he possessed them only for men and in the sight of men; but in the sight of Jehovah they were of no value. Did he love the Lord? How should he? Did he love his glory? No, he only loved his own. Did he do the will of God? No; the will of his flesh. He was a man of the world, attached to the vanities of earth, and dead in sins. But this did not prevent the God of grace from forming ideas of deliverance respecting him. Does it displease you that the grace of God acts so unlimitedly? *We* are not displeased. On the contrary, we can rejoice and be glad, when we hear and learn that he has no respect to the person of an individual, but has mercy

on whom he will have mercy, without regard to the sin or virtue of any one.

But what means does he employ for approaching the lost sheep? How will he find and lay hold of the man, who does not cherish the slightest presentiment of him, the living God, but, far from the sound of his Word, is sitting captive in the dark magic circle of his superstitious and erroneous faith? Be not afraid. He will be able to find means for reaching this his chosen vessel. The Divine delivering hand knows no obstructions, no preventing limits. It operates as rapidly and as surely at Damascus as at Jerusalem. Who would suppose that the leprosy with which the man is infected, is the first link in the chain of those gracious dispensations which aim at his conversion? The second link in this chain is a circumstance, from which we might be still less induced to believe, that it could any way lead, in the present instance, to the attainment of the desired object. The event to which I refer, is the following. Some months earlier, at the period when hostilities were still being carried on between Benhadad and the king of Israel, a division of the Syrian troops, under cover of the night and darkness, rushed into the enemy's territory, cut down the out-posts on the borders, fell with drawn swords upon an unprotected village which was near at hand, plundered the houses and cottages, and carried off, amongst other booty, a young Israelitish maid. The poor child is unmercifully torn away from the heart of her inconsolable parents, bound like a victim for sacrifice, and thus dragged across the borders into a foreign and inhospitable country, in order to be brought to market there, and sold as a slave to the first sufficient bidder.

What do we say to this event? Is not our indignation

roused at such a barbarous stratagem? But the conduct of God in this affair *surprises* us. "Why," we are inclined to enquire with a shake of the head, "why does he not prevent such cruelties? Where, in this instance, is 'the keeper of Israel who neither slumbereth nor sleepeth?' What have become of his promises?" Yes, such-like thoughts as these dart through our hearts at such a circumstance; but it is just in instances like these, that it again becomes palpably evident, how easily we mistake in judging of the ways of God, when we do not wait to see the end of them. For just in this very case, where we, short-sighted creatures, are unable to discover the slightest trace of Divine governance, the Lord begins to put a plan into execution, which by the wisdom of its arrangements, will in due time constrain us to the profoundest admiration. In this very instance, where the consolatory axioms of the existence of a living God, of an omnipotent protector of Israel, and of a paternal and loving defence of the peculiar people, seem entirely to fall to the ground; these principles, on the contrary, find, to our astonishment, a renewed and brilliant confirmation. Have but a little patience, and how gloriously will you behold this dark affair become enlightened and unravelled! Know however so much before-hand, that those mercenaries have caught a nightingale, which is destined to sing the songs of Zion in the darkness of Syria; have carried off a star, for the rayless death-like obscurity of their country; bear in their hands that torch, which Jehovah has determined to cast into the heart of their benighted kingdom, and transplant, from the garden of Israel, a flower into their native soil, whose balsamic perfume will serve, not for the restoration of the diseased Naaman alone. Yes, this mysterious occurrence will so develop itself, that the pitiable

little maid will have to kiss the hands of the Eternal God for not having come to her rescue, at the moment of her being taken captive; and the leper confess, with loud thanks to the Lord, that a good angel was sent to him at Damascus, in the person of this child; and the whole heathenish city will be compelled, by the circumstance, to confess that the Lord is God, and that there is none besides; and we shall also strike our hands together astonished, and be obliged to confess with renewed conviction, that we only need to let the Lord quietly carry on his work. He is mighty in counsel, and wonderful in working.

O happy is he, who proceeds on his way under the guidance of such a Lord, and is permitted to believe that his life rests also like a series of threads upon the loom of the Great Artificer! He may calculate beyond a doubt, that just at the point when the threads of his life seem the most entangled and confused, the most wonderful and glorious traces of his ingenious hand which overrules and directs all things, will manifest themselves. Let faith be his guide for a while in the dark, through the turmoil and apparent contradictions of his life; the time will come, when the Divine mechanism of our guidance will stand before us in complete development, and fill us with astonishment and delight. For the sentiment is eternally true, and more firmly established than the mountains of God, which the Royal harper on Zion's hill still sings to us, "The Lord is merciful and gracious, therefore will he teach sinners in the way. The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way. All the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth, unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies." Amen.



X.

THE LITTLE ISRAELITISH MAID.

ONE of those proverbs, so replete with meaning, which King Solomon has left us—the seventeenth in the first chapter of his book—says, “Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird.” This expression meets with ample interpretation in the gracious guidance of all God’s children. But these birds are nevertheless caught, as Paul says, “with craftiness and guile.” The Lord sees that it would be in vain to spread the net before their eyes. Hadst thou known before-hand, my brother, that thou wouldst be pricked to the heart whilst listening to a certain sermon, that intercourse with some particular individual would have been the occasion of thy humiliation and contrition, that a book thou didst peruse, would throw the fire of repentance into thy soul, break thy heart, and embitter and degrade the world, with its pleasures, in thy esteem, thou wouldst have hastened, in thy natural blindness, to have cast far from thee the fatal volume, to have dissolved the bond of friendship, and to have avoided the church on that day of danger. But the net was concealed from the sight of the bird, and before it was aware, the snare was drawn over it, and—thou wast taken.

And the Lord acts in the progress of the life of grace in the same manner as he did at its commencement. The maxim continues in force, “Surely it is in vain, that the net is spread in the sight of any bird.” He does not cease throwing out the net, in order to draw us ever closer to

himself, and to connect us more intimately with him. But the net is concealed from our view. He does not inform us before-hand what he intends shall befall us, neither does he initiate us into his plans. He withdraws himself, lets us take our own course, and causes us to feel his anger afresh, in order to renew us to repentance, to empty us more completely of all that is our own, and afterwards to cause us to feel, in a more lively manner, what we possess in him and his grace. But he does not betray to us that this is only a seeming withdrawal, displeasure, and abandonment, and that it is his love alone which disguises itself in this rude covering; for if we knew from the first, that he was only *sporting* with us in all that we have just mentioned, it would be in vain for him to spread the net. Hence he is wont carefully to conceal his snares from our view, and thus he never fails of his aim. In the guidance of Naaman, likewise, he is not unmindful how fruitless it is to spread the net in the sight of the bird. The snare is very deeply laid, and we shall soon see how this mighty man is caught in the Lord's gracious toils.

2 KINGS V. 3.

“And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy.”

Damascus, the metropolis of Syria, again receives us. An attractive acquaintance, which we have there made, begins gradually to render this heathenish place agreeable to us. It is always the inhabitants which make a place desirable and beautiful, and not the partitions or the walls. Naaman is the friend whom we met, the valiant general-

issimo of the Syrian army. That however which attracts us to this individual is, not the fame of his mighty deeds, which irradiates him, but something widely different. The eye of Divine love and compassion rests upon him ; and it is this which captivates us : in this we behold his highest glory, his peculiar excellency. At our first meeting with this warrior, there was, indeed, little to be perceived of his being a favourite of Jehovah's. He was a blind, unenlightened heathen, destitute of the true knowledge of God, and the circumstances in which he was placed, reminded us rather of a manifestation of the Divine displeasure than of anything else. You know that, afflicted with the dreadful plague of leprosy, he sat, banished from human society, and presenting a repulsive appearance, shut up in a solitary chamber of his palace. We left his gloomy cell with mournful reflections upon the imperfect nature of earthly happiness. At the very moment, however, when we beheld with painful sympathy, the temporal glory of this mighty individual sinking, faded and dead into the grave, the first dawning glimmer of an incomparably superior glory began to rise upon our eyes over its ashes. The Almighty made the preliminary arrangements for the eternal restoration of this individual. But how strange were the commencements of this work of love ! We saw a Syrian out-post break through the Israelitish borders. They there fell upon an unguarded village, plundered it, and dragged away with them a young Israelitish maid, in order to sell her as a slave in Syria. Now who would have imagined, that in this heart-rending scene, the Lord began the accomplishment of his Divine and gracious project with respect to Naaman ? The portion of the narrative which we have just read will show, in some respects, how far the knots which were tied will begin to be unloosed. We

will at present consider, **THE PURCHASE**, so IMPORTANT IN ITS RESULTS; **THE EXPANSION OF A FLOWER OF PARADISE IN A HEATHEN LAND**; and **THE FIRST RAY OF HOPE IN THE GLOOMY NIGHT OF SORROW**.

I.

We take our station, first of all, in the market-place at Damascus. Horrifying scenes there present themselves to our view. Numbers of poor people, carried away from their native land, and violently torn from the bosom of their families, are bound together in couples, with the cattle destined for the slaughter, and are taxed and publicly offered for sale, like horses and oxen. Purchasers gather round the unfortunate creatures, inspect them, try their agility and strength, and then begin to bid and bargain, as if it were for merchandise. And no sooner is a bargain struck, than the purchaser drives home his slave, and possesses the right, not only to impose upon him any yoke he pleases, but even to dispose of his life. We walk in spirit with heartfelt sympathy, up and down the pitiable ranks, when, lo! the unhappy Israelitish girl, surrounded by those who carried her off, meets our view. Trembling, like a lamb about to be slaughtered, the poor maiden stands there, her head depending upon her breast pale as death, and her countenance disfigured by weeping. Alas! how sad her fate, although so young! grief seems as if it would even break the heart of the poor girl, especially when she thinks of her father and mother, and of her distant home, so unspeakably dear to her. Ah! had the choice been left her, how much she would have preferred her remains being covered by some grassy hillock in her native land! The pangs of death would have been more tolerable to her than the sorrow occasioned by such a mournful abandon-

ment in a hostile and foreign country. O, Jehovah! thou God and Saviour of her fathers, where art thou? In such-like anxious inquiries and ejaculations she consumes her soul.

Look, a carriage rolls towards us, which stops in the vicinity of the poor captive. Servants hastily approach, and open the door; and a lady steps out, whose simple costume is as little able as the expression of profound grief and anxiety in her countenance, to conceal from us the female of high rank and brilliant connexions. She wishes also to purchase a slave. The sickness of her consort renders an increased number of attendants requisite. Is it the spouse of the field-marshal whom we see before us? No other. She approaches, and begins the examination. Many a young girl is brought before her, and most highly recommended. She sees one and another, who do not altogether displease her; but still—she knows not the reason herself—she cannot seriously reflect upon any of them. All at once her eye falls upon the captive Israelite, and the sight and the choice of her are the work of the same moment. I am unable to say what it is which so instantaneously and irresistibly attracts her to the child—whether it is the profound and pitiable grief in the features of the girl, the delicacy and modesty which expresses itself in her deportment, or the circumstance of perceiving that she is an Israelite; for Israelitish females were usually preferred to every other, on account of their superior manners, as well as their sincerity and fidelity. Be this as it may, her heart decides in favour of the Israelitish maiden. But who induced this decision? Not the purchaser; but the voice which called the universe into existence, and does not disdain to whisper even to a poor human heart.

The price is offered, the bargain concluded. Fortunate

and important transaction! What did the purchaser imagine she had purchased in the girl? She supposed merely a slave, and her penetration reached no further. But we know better what she carried home in the person of her young slave. In reality, never was a better purchase made in any market. Whilst looking at the Israelitish maid, she sees nothing less than the angel, by whose means her house of mourning is destined again to bloom like a paradise upon earth. In this child she has purchased a messenger from heaven, who is destined in the sequel to conduct herself and her house into the arms of the living God. She carries home in the little girl, a star appointed by Eternal Love, not merely to enlighten the death-like shade of her life, and that of those belonging to her, and to act as a guide to the source of corporal restoration, but also to the mansions of an eternal and sabbatic repose; and who is able fully to express all that she has besides obtained in this unassuming floweret from the hills of Canaan! She does not indeed dream in the most distant manner of all this; but it is well known to him who so strikingly and pleasingly made her the mistress of the child; who told her to drive that day and no other, neither earlier nor later, to the market; who arranged it, that of all the young females that were offered to her, none of them entirely satisfied her, but incited her to an immediate and complete decision the first moment she saw the Israelite. In this instance you again perceive how true it is, that "he gives it to his beloved while they sleep;" and how little David hazarded when he exclaimed, "I will both lay me down and sleep, for thou, Lord, only makest me to dwell in safety." The world says, indeed, that "every man is the maker of his own fortune." But we know to the contrary; we know better. One thing only

is needful—that Jehovah be kind and propitious to us. We may then let the vessel of our life drift whither it will ; for it hits, as of itself, the right track. Eternal Love guides the helm instead of our own prudence, and the pinions of an omnipotent and gracious protection rests extended over it.

The contemplation of the singular concatenation of diversified events by which the Lord prepared help and deliverance for Naaman, excites in us the inquiry, why the Lord did not go more simply and directly to work? By a single word, spoken immediately from heaven, he could at once have delivered the sorely afflicted man from his disease. Certainly he could have done so. Why, therefore, all the accumulated intermediate causes and links of the chain—such as the captivity of the Israelitish maid, the purchase in the market-place, and whatever else occurred? I reply, that God's mode of procedure is a very different one from ours. We have generally only one object in view, and to its attainment our whole attention and efforts are directed. The Lord never forms a plan for an isolated object ; but his projects are always like the clouds of heaven—amply filled, and heavily laden. A hundred minor objects go hand in hand with the principal one, all which are to be realized in one act. Even as his words are not wont to convey a single idea like the words of men, but contain within them whole creations of ideas, so his deeds and actions produce thousandfold results, and call into life a whole series of the most manifold occurrences. There is a kind of rocket, which when set fire to, ascends on high, like a single flame, but then suddenly bursts asunder, and emits innumerable fire-balls, flashes, and stars, which we behold darting forth in an instant, in splendid brilliancy, in every direction. The case is similar—if that which is supremely sublime may be compared

with such a trifling object—with the words and deeds of Jehovah. What did the Lord intend in the narrative we are considering? First of all, the cure and conversion of Naaman. This was his immediate, his principal aim. But how many objects of a different nature, like a circle of planets revolving round the sun, accompanied the latter? The purposes of the Lord extended at the same time to Naaman's wife and his whole household; to the land of Syria; to its prince Ben-hadad; and to king Jehoram; to the Israelitish girl; to all Israel; to us the posterity of the latest ages; and who can say to how many other individuals and objects? All these divine intentions were to be accomplished in a single act; and it becomes us duly to consider and keep in view this method of the Divine procedure. It will shed a radiance upon much that is obscure in our own guidance, present us the solution to much that is problematical, and especially interpret to us the mystery, why the Almighty is so frequently wont not to grant us the blessing we desire, and the assistance we supplicate immediately, but only in the most unexpected and circuitous manner.

II.

We leave the market-place of Damascus, and return to the mansion of the diseased warrior. Naaman sits as before, bowed down and dejected in his chamber. His misery has reached its height, and the last hope of recovery has disappeared. We find in an adjoining apartment, the consort of our unfortunate hero, and the little Israelitish maid near her, engaged in some manual employment. By her unassuming, gentle, and obliging deportment, the dear child has already gained the good-will and confidence of all the members of the household; yet still they have

scarcely any idea of all that they possess in the little girl. Nor have we hitherto become thoroughly acquainted with the child. Her inward form still continues veiled from us; but the curtain will now be drawn aside. The general's lady, who no longer thinks it beneath her dignity to choose the amiable girl for her companion, and to enter into confidential discourse with her, feels impelled to pour out the sorrows of her heart into her sympathizing breast. The work suddenly falls from the hands of the young maiden, and a tear forces itself into her eye, such as love weeps, or compassion, or the home-ache; and with the expression of the most heartfelt emotion in every feature, she exclaims with a sigh, "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy."

It is in this ejaculation, that we first become duly acquainted with our little stranger. The Israelite meets us in it; and truly, more than an Israelite, according to the flesh. This ejaculation is like the appearance of silver in a smelting-house, which gives us the first unequivocal information of there being more of that precious metal in the crucibles. It is as the note of the nightingale in the spring, from a far distant wood, and like the gentle murmuring flow of a deeply concealed subterraneous spring of water. Yes, this ejaculation throws the first enlightening ray upon her inward world, and a heavenly flower unfolds itself in it before our eyes; a rose of Paradise in the midst of the wilderness of the heathen world; a dew-drop of the eternal dawn sparkles in its cup, and its leaves tremble upwards towards the heavenly light. For the girl's home-ache after the land of her fathers, the fervent simplicity of her faith, and her childlike confidence in the interpreter and ambassador of Jehovah—all this, and infi-

nately more, glimmers in a lovely manner through the painfully emitted ejaculation. We dare no longer hesitate to present her the fraternal hand, as a daughter of Abraham according to the spirit. She is a sister in the Lord, a child of God, a fellow-citizen of the kingdom of glory.

This ejaculation was probably the first audible sound, since her captivity, in which she had revealed the hidden mystery of her inward life in the presence of others. Alas! she would not have been understood in that Pagan country, and ridicule and mockery would have been intolerable to her. Shutting up the fire of her faith and her longing in her oppressed bosom, she proceeded calmly and silently upon her way, like a little bird, which mourns solitary in its cage; or like a flower, which, transplanted from the verdant and well-watered meadow into a barren waste, mournfully lets its fading leaves hang downwards towards the ground. O, how often may the wide world have been too narrow for her, on account of the unutterable home-ache which preyed upon her soul, when she reflected upon the dear and holy land, which was trodden by the feet of the prophets of her God; and on the beloved and peaceful cottage, where her father and mother and the rest of her family dwelt; and of the social conversations, and the narratives which were related in the shades of evening under the fig-tree and the vine; and of the psalms and lovely hymns which she herself had there sung with feelings of deep emotion; and of so many other never-to-be-forgotten incomparably delightful scenes and circumstances. O, how often may sorrow at such times have overpowered her—a sorrow even unto death, accompanied by a weeping and a sobbing to such a degree that she might have bathed herself in her tears! How frequently did she probably experience what room there was in

her little heart for a world full of pain and sorrow, and that the idea of the whole soul dissolving itself in grief and suffering was a reality, and not a mere figurative mode of expression. She was certainly still possessed of strong consolation, otherwise she would have perished in her misery—the consolation that Jehovah's arm is not shortened, and that his eye runs through every land. She probably strove to cling firmly and convulsively with both hands to the strong staff of this consolatory idea, and was certainly never alone in her chamber without sinking down at the feet of her covenant God, with the question, "Ah, Lord, tell me, am I here forsaken and alone, or may I console myself also in this foreign land with thy presence?" and doubtless Jehovah did not entirely withdraw himself from the poor orphan child, but always surprised her again at the proper time with his gracious visits, and cheered her deeply humbled soul with his friendly converse. It is, however, no easy matter for us poor dwellers in the dust to be with God alone in the wide world, and to find nowhere amongst mankind an echo to our dearest convictions and most sacred interests. O it is something very thankworthy and sweet for believers to be able to say with the Shunammite, "I dwell among my own people!" We, my brethren, enjoy this happiness in a rich and superabundant measure. O that we only knew how to esteem and value it in a better manner! When our hearts are oppressed, or when, after the labours of the day we long for some cheering recreation, it scarcely costs us more than a few steps, in whatever part of the town we may reside, and we have already arrived at the cottage of some true Israelite, where we find ourselves in the circle of those that are likeminded, and our complaints meet with an open ear, our scruples a comfortable solution, our

words and thoughts a living echo, and where our sorrows and our joys are understood, imparted, and inwardly participated. It only requires that, like this little Israelitish maid, we should be sentenced and exiled for a period to some foreign and solitary shore, and stand alone with our faith, like so many of our more distant brethren and sisters, in a cold, unbelieving, and benighted world; and then how would those advantages rise in value, with respect to which the habitual possession renders us at present almost indifferent! Thousands envy us the pleasing lot of brotherly fellowship which has fallen to us, and think we ought indeed to flourish fresh and fair in a spiritual sense, amid the streams of incitement and encouragement which daily rush around us. But, alas! how do we flourish? O, we do not ourselves too often trouble the spring from whence we might derive so much that is unspeakably good and lovely! Did we love one another more, my brethren; did we cling more firmly, unanimously, and closely to each other, and associate with each other more confidentially, sincerely, and candidly than is generally the case, how great would be our gain in blessing and real peace! "Therefore, if you attach any value," I exclaim with Paul, "to consolation in Christ, to the comfort of love, to the fellowship of the Spirit, and to heartfelt love and compassion, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind," and "in lowliness of heart, let each esteem the other better than themselves."

III.

Our little maiden had therefore succeeded in concealing for a time the inmost germ of her being and her connexion with the living God behind the veil of profound and timid

silence. But the more the fire of faith and of Divine desire is limited and restrained from without, the higher rises its inward and intensive power. A man whose heart is really imbued with life from God will only be able for a while to conceal his superior nobility from the world. Ere the people are aware, he powerfully claps his wings, and feels compelled to the most pleasing betrayal of himself. Such was also the case with this daughter of Israel. Her hidden life broke out in her ejaculation, and that too just at the proper time, in the right place, and in the proper manner. The Lord, who had conducted her into that house for the eternal salvation of her proprietors, ordered it thus. But this important object now demanded that she should no longer disguise herself, but open her mouth, and make it manifest of what spirit she was, and from whence she came.

Whether the little maid was particularly learned and well-instructed, I am not able to say, but do not doubt that she took sufficient with her, out of the treasury of the Word of God, into the desert and foreign land, not only to live upon herself, but also to kindle a light-house flame in the obscurity of a soul that stood in need of help and consolation. "For this purpose," observes here a well-known commentator, "that one excellent passage from the prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the temple, which is recorded in 1 Kings viii. 41—43, would have been sufficient: 'Moreover, concerning a stranger that is not of thy people Israel, but cometh out of a far country for thy name's sake. (For they shall hear of thy great name, and of thy strong hand, and of thy stretched-out arm;) when he shall come and pray towards this house; hear thou in heaven, thy dwelling-place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for; that all people of the earth may know thy name to fear thee, as do thy

people Israel; and that they may know that this house, which I have builded, is called by thy name.'” Nay, who knows whether this or some similar passage of Scripture did not really present itself to her memory in that eventful moment? This, at least, was certainly not unknown to her, that God was not merely the God of the Jews, but also the God of the Gentiles. This was infallibly beyond a doubt with her, that even Naaman, if he humbled himself before Jehovah, would recover, as well as any other, in the radiance of his benignant countenance, and blissfully experience the truth of the consolatory saying, that the grace of God extended not only to the borders of Canaan, but also as far as the clouds are carried in the air. But what was it the little maid said to her mistress? Have not you heard it? “Would God,” sighed she, “that my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria,”—she meant Elisha, the man of God, of whom she had already heard, or perhaps, even seen such great things—“for he would recover him of his leprosy!” or literally, *collect* him from his leprosy; that is, bring him out of his retirement in perfect health, re-introduce him into human society, and confer a variety of other benefits upon him.

The little maid certainly said no more, and spoke merely at random in her simplicity, not having herself the most distant idea, what important words those were which she had been uttering. But scarcely have they passed her lips, before they produce unexpected and wonderful effects. Her mistress casts upon her a significant look, as if she would say, “Child, of what art thou speaking?” then rises hastily from her seat, runs to her unfortunate consort, calls him joyfully by his name, and amidst great emotion of feeling, relates to him what the Israelitish maid had said.

Ah, a cheering ray flashes once more, after a long period of distress, over the troubled countenance of the poor invalid; and his soul, rising up as it were from a deep and gloomy sepulchre, suddenly perceives itself torn from the horrors of despair, and restored to the rosy spheres of more cheering prospects. O what a variety of feelings were excited by the ejaculation of the daughter of Abraham! By it she overthrew in an instant the cloud-capp'd battlements, which environed the afflicted couple, the horrifying dungeon-walls of hopelessness and despair, and hurled, by her ejaculation, the first flash of a new hope into their mournful darkness. She unfolded golden and heart-enchancing prospects to them through the dense and gloomy masses of the heavy clouds of anxiety and sorrow, which had spread themselves over their life, and by her simple words conjured up a bright and promising rainbow in the oppressive and tempestuous night of their existence. The poor people, who dreamed of nothing else than separation, death, and the grave, now see the most sunny regions of a vividly verdant future all at once unfold themselves to their view. They, who on the foaming billows of their sea of affliction, already regarded themselves as irrecoverably given up to storms and whirlpools, now suddenly exclaim, "Land! Land!" in their hearts, and again hoist up the rosy-coloured flag of hope. They see a new world in the distance lying open before them, encompassed with a haze, indeed, but it is the haze of the morning dawn, which promises a bright and glorious day. They have a strong presentiment, which scarcely permits them to doubt, that the star of their good fortune will there again rise upon them; and a thousand bright images of the future, half veiled, half developed, and profoundly beatifying, flit past their mental eye.

And we too, my dear friends, are here reminded of a beauteous period of our lives. As we then felt, so Naaman and his spouse probably also felt, after they had received from the Hebrew girl this first, and pregnant intimation of relief. I speak of that period, when after we had long wandered about, restlessly and despondingly, between the gloomy fogs of a lively experienced inward uneasiness, of a profound disgust at the world and its vanity, and of a feeling, though certainly still vague, of our alienation from God, the first Gospel light suddenly shone in upon our darkness. It was just as if some one had suddenly burst open the iron barriers, behind which we had been held captive for years together, and as if we saw in a moment, as it were, a new and wondrous world lying before us in the lovely and azure distance. O how did our hearts then beat, and what sweet and delightful forebodings crowded one after the other through our souls! We felt that the world we beheld, was that in which we should find what we sought; that there bloomed our happiness, our life, our repose; and that beneath that mysterious and hope-exciting dimness, lay the longed-for Eden of our hearts. Like the sound of bells inviting us to an eternal Sabbath, did the words affect our hearts, "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden; I will give you rest!" Like a song in the night, did the passage sound in our ears, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." We saw one pass through this world of wonders like unto the Son of man. We then thought, "Thou art he; thou canst heal us, or no one can." We perceived in the distant haze, a towering sign, formed like a cross, and anticipated, that there grew the tree of life, that in this sign we should conquer, and in none besides. A hope, a desire, and a joy, such as we had never felt before pervaded our breasts, which were,

touched as with a heavenly magnet; and tell me, my friends, after subsequently entering into this world, did we find that our hopes were in vain, or that our foreboding had deceived us?

O blessed is he, who finds a place in this world of light, in this kingdom of love, in this, though invisible yet substantial world, through which the feet of Jesus pass, and where there is counsel, comfort, and help under all circumstances and in every emergency; in this world, upon which the angels of God ascend and descend, and in which sinners rest on the heart of Jehovah, and find repose in the arms of eternal love! O with what colours ought his happiness to be painted, whom the hand of the Lord conducts into the peaceful region of this paradise of grace! Enter, therefore, enter whoever you are that are still standing without. Let him who loves his soul, join our ranks. Here alone is peace, security, and life. Here is the house of God, yea, here is the gate of heaven. The inscription over the gate of this kingdom, it is true, sounds harshly. It says, "Whoever he be that forsaketh not *all* that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." But on the opposite side of the portal, we read the words, "Here is serenity, here the weary are refreshed, and here repose is enjoyed!" and from a thousand pillars, which stand more firmly than the everlasting hills, the words beam towards us, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love. I am thy God and thy all; what is mine, is also thine for evermore."

XI.

THE PILGRIMAGE.

You know the consolatory words of our Lord, recorded in Luke xix. 10, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost." The Son of man! Sweet appellation! On the wings of this expression he inclines himself kindly and confidentially towards us. This title is a palm-branch, not an awful sceptre; an enticing invitation, and not a repelling command, such as that contained in the words, "Put off thy shoe from off thy foot, and stand at a distance!" The Son of man "is come." Blessed be God that he is so! If he were not, I could execrate the day of my birth. But now since the inscription shines upon the pillars of our earth, "Messiah is come," let us hear no more of a vale of tears. I can never tire myself with reading these three words. Three stars smile upon me in them, whose radiance more than compensates for the loss of paradise.

But to whom has the visit of the great prince of peace reference? Where lay the magnet, which drew him down from his blissful exaltation into this poor world? One would suppose it ought to be sought for in a select number of the pious, the penitent, the holy, and the righteous. But such is by no means the case. If thou wert in any degree pure and holy in thyself, we should not be acting properly to bring the Gospel of peace to thee. For the people, for whose sake Christ came, are mentioned in that passage, not as righteous, but by a word, which signifies in the

original so little of anything beautiful, good, and commendable, that it expresses on the contrary, the extreme of all that is miserable, degenerate, and corrupt.

The expression reminds us of a sheep without a shepherd, which has strayed into a waste howling wilderness, which finding nowhere a hospitable shelter, is given up, in its helpless impotency, to the ravening wolf, and ignorant of the way, rushes towards a bloody end. The word has reference to a sunken vessel, which lies with broken mast and rudder, in the depths of the sea. The mountainous waves foam over it; it is lost, and its rising again is entirely out of the question. It reminds us of a man, who has borrowed large sums of money, yet, when he ought to repay them, the extensive property has been all spent, not a farthing remains, and he cannot prevent his house from being sold over his head, and his table, chair, and bed from being carried to the market. The words pourtray to our view a situation, in which everything has been trifled away, and irretrievably expended—happiness, honour, strength, and even life itself destroyed. Yea, the words indicate something extremely corrupt, reprobate, and desolate, which is no longer capable of repair, and in which there is nothing left to patch up or amend.

All this is contained in the words. Now examine thyself, and look whether thy own state is not depicted in them; and if thou recognizest thy own figure and situation in the expression—be terrified, mourn, and lament; but at the same time clap the pinions of joyful hope; for it is just such lost characters as these, that the Divine Mediator came to seek and to save.

The misery of sin is the card of admission into the temple of the New Testament. He that suffers himself to be deterred instead of being encouraged by the consciousness

of his corruption, is a fool. Self-made holiness is a coin, which has no value before the throne of grace; but he that approaches it, and says, "Sin is all I bring," need not be afraid of a repulse. If I desire that Jesus should save me, I exclaim, "Lord, I am lost!" and even if I really possessed good qualities and good works, I would on no account appeal to them. The Lord might reply to me, and say, "Wherever did I say, that I came to save the righteous?" But he cannot say to me, "Where have I declared that I came to seek that which is lost?" I should have a witness against him, in Luke xix. 10. You may plead before him the sincerity of your repentance, the fervour of your devotion, the sincerity of your desire, or whatever it be, as much as you please; but I will say to him, "Lord Jesus, I am a lost, an utterly lost man; *therefore* have mercy upon me!" and know, that this plea would overcome him, even were he unwilling to have compassion. In this plea there lies a motive for him to hear and to save me, which he cannot reject. He is as little able to shut his heart against this plea, as he is capable of denying himself and gainsaying his own words.

Yes, they that are lost are the objects of his delivering love. He is come *to seek and to save*. This he points out himself as his most peculiar vocation, and as the most essential object of his manifestation. God be praised, that such is the position of things, and that the seeking is not first expected from us! Who would then come to Jesus? Not a single soul in the wide world. For we are not lost like a traveller who has missed his road, and by serious reflection or with the aid of the guide-posts is able in the end to find his way again. We are lost like a lost piece of silver, which can never of itself leap again into the purse; but which thou must go in quest of, with lantern and broom.

Happy is it, therefore, for us, that he who alone can save us, is also willing to *seek*, and not merely *expect* us. And what he seeks, he is able to find, wherever it may be hidden. The history of Naaman, the Syrian, shows us this truth in a pleasing and lovely manner.

2 KINGS v. 4—7.

“And Naaman went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel.

“And the king of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel. And he departed and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment.

“And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, Now, when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy.

“And it came to pass, when the King of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? Wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me.”

The difficult riddle contained in the narrative we are considering, begins to solve itself in the most glorious manner. The day dawns, and the sun rises in the portion we have now read. We already clearly perceive what will be the result. Three points claim at present our most sympathizing attention. **THE PREPARATION FOR THE JOURNEY TO CANAAN, THE PASSPORT, AND NAA-MAN'S APPEARING IN SAMARIA.**

I.

The ejaculation of the young Israelitish girl, “Would God that my lord were with the prophet in Samaria!” produced its effect. It is astonishing how much a single

word, when spoken merely casually, and without any particular intention—whoever utters it—is able to effect and accomplish, when the Lord is with it, and establishes it. It never could have occurred to the maid at Damascus to attach any importance to an ejaculation which had thus involuntarily escaped her; and yet what a series of the most important facts gradually developed themselves in consequence of it! But why? Because the Omnipotent Disposer of all things would have it so. This insignificant expression, “Would God that my lord were in Samaria!” came flying, like a dove with the olive-leaf of hope in its mouth, to Naaman and his wife, and flashed down like vivid lightning into their darkness; it flamed like a gentle star, pointing to the fountain of grace, in the gloomy and beclouded sky of their life, and served the Lord as an iron-crow, to break through the wall of heathenism; as a scaling-ladder, which conquered fortresses for him; and as a victorious sword, by which he took one captive after another from Satan, as well as for a variety of other uses and purposes.

O, well may it be said of the children of God, that they are the salt of the earth, and appointed by God to be a blessing to it! They pass through the world like beneficent clouds, and even their words are not lost. How blissful will at length be their astonishment, when the Lord shall finally lift the veil from their earthly course, and show them what beautiful crops, of which they themselves were ignorant, sprang forth in silent concealment, under the dew of his grace, from the germs of their words and actions upon earth. They will then see that they have not lived in vain, even as it respects others, and their works shall remain. No stream of time shall carry them away. They follow after them into futurity.

For the confirmation of this truth, I will adduce an in-

stance, which, though perhaps already known to many of you, deserves a place here, especially because it so obviously tends to prove that the words of Solomon, "The thing that hath been, is that which shall be," is applicable likewise to pleasing events under the sun.

From ancient times, mount Caucasus, in Georgia, has been inhabited by a race of people, known under the name of Iberians, who, even in the earliest ages, whilst all around them were sitting in darkness and the shadow of death, were found in full possession of all the blessings of the Gospel. About fifteen centuries ago, three hundred years after the birth of Christ, these mountaineers were brought out of the profoundest darkness of heathenism, into the light and peaceful folds of Jesus, the good Shepherd, in the following wonderful and truly glorious manner.

The Iberians were entangled in a war with a people, amongst whom Christianity had already gained some ground. After obtaining a victory over them, they carried off with them, from a place in the enemy's territory, amongst other booty, a young girl, with the intention of selling her in their own land for a slave. An Iberian family of rank purchased the youthful foreigner, but had as little idea as Naaman's consort, *what* a blessing she would eventually be to them. For know, that the young female was a bride of Christ, and a vessel of Divine light, as well as of Divine mercy. Thus the poor captive spent her solitary and desolate life in the midst of a savage and idolatrous horde; but however many tears may have bedewed her cheeks in secret, her courage did not fail her. Her Saviour, and the promise of his continual presence, was her strong consolation in her misery. With silent willingness she did what was commanded her, and even more; and the obliging disposition, and the fidelity she

exemplified, which was a scarce jewel amongst the Iberians, gained her, in a short time, the love and confidence of all.

It happened one day, that according to the custom of the people, a sick child was carried about from door to door, in order that if any one knew of a remedy for its disease, they might mention it. No one, however, could recommend any thing, and the majority even wondered that any hope could still be cherished of the child's recovery; and the poor parents, with increasing grief and affliction, proceeded further with their dying favourite. Suddenly the idea occurred to some one, I know not whom, to show the child to the young captive, and inquire of her whether she was acquainted with any successful remedy in use in her own country: and people are easily inclined to concur in any proposition, after having arrived in the region of "the forlorn hope." The little couch was immediately transported to the house, where Nunnia—for so the Christian girl was called—was in service, and she was called out. Nunnia appears, and is informed of the people. She replies, however, with an embarrassed look, that a poor girl like her was not able to help them; but continues, with a more cheerful countenance, "I could mention one to you, who is not only able to heal this child of its disease, but also to raise it from the dead." To the hasty inquiry of the afflicted parents, Who it was, and where he dwelt? she answered, that he was a great and mighty Lord, who was seated on high, on the throne of heaven; but that notwithstanding, he willingly condescended to all who longed for him, and that he was love and compassion itself. "Go, then," said the parents to her, in a supplicating tone, "and fetch him;" and the girl went, and bowed her knee before her Lord Jesus

Christ, and prayed, saying, "O Lord Jesus, appear, reveal thyself, and help, for thine honour's sake!" And on returning from prayer, with the divine "Amen" in her-delighted breast, the sick child really opened its eyes, looked smilingly around, and was restored to health. The happy parents, intoxicated with joy, returned home with their treasure, and whoever met them on the way, was obliged to stop and hear what great and glorious things had occurred.

However, the miracle was not ascribed to him that performed it, but to the foreign slave, who now appeared to the people in the lustre of a superior and superhuman being. The occurrence, as if borne on the wings of the wind, soon became notorious throughout the country. It reached also the ears of the queen; and when the latter, not long after, was taken grievously ill, her first thought was, the foreign slave. She sent messengers to her, requesting her to come to her. But Nunnia declined the invitation, and remained at home. It caused her profound sorrow that attempts were made to put that honour upon her, which belonged solely to her Lord. But what occurred? The queen caused herself to be carried to her in person. When Nunnia saw this, it deeply affected her. She prayed, and the queen actually went home healed.

When Miraus, for so the king was called, saw his beloved consort returning to him completely restored to health, he was almost beside himself for joy, and made preparations for sending the richest and most valuable presents to the female wonder-worker. But the queen seriously dissuaded him from his intention, by assuring him, that he would only grieve the young girl by this means; for she disdained all earthly possessions, and only considered herself rewarded for her services, when people

bowed the knee with her before her God. This caused the king no small degree of astonishment, without, however, producing any further impression on his heart for the time. And, generally speaking, the ray of heavenly light, which by the twofold wonder had shone into the Iberian darkness, continued for the time without any abiding effects.

The king went one day to the chase. Whilst following some game, he lost himself, in the heat of the chase, in a large forest: a dense fog surprised him there, and entirely separated him from his attendants. No longer knowing where he was, he sought for an outlet, but found none, and strayed further and further into the solitary wilderness. Evening approached, and his perplexity rose to its height. He blew his horn, but the echo of the ravines was the only reply that was returned to him, and this served only to heighten his loneliness. The young female stranger then occurred to him, and what she had said of her great and invisible King, who, though he had his castle and his court in the realm above, was nevertheless in every place, where the desires of the heart were directed to him. "If this be the case," thought Miraus, "what prevents his appearing to me?" and thinking thus, he bent his knee in the dust, in the loneliness of the forest, and began to pray, pervaded by the thrilling sensation of sacred devotion. "Thou, whom the youthful captive calls her God," were his words; "Jesus, if thou art living and almighty, manifest that thou art so, and help me out of this labyrinth. If thou enablest me to escape from it, my heart, my life, and what I am and have shall be thine!" Such was his prayer, and his prayer was sincere. But scarcely had the words escaped his lips, when the dark gloomy vapour folded itself together like a garment,

and heaven again looked blue and brightly down, and the astonished king only advanced a few paces forward in the wood, when he suddenly perceived where he was, and found the outlet. He returned in safety to his family. His consort was the first to whom he related, with deep emotion, what had occurred to him. They now no longer doubted that the captive's God was the living and the true God. They have had tangible proof of it. The next day the first person they visited was Nunnia, to whom they wished to relate the great event which had occurred. The king informed her, with evident emotion, of the miraculous interposition he had experienced: both the king and the queen then took the maiden by the hand, and said, "O tell us something more concerning thy Jesus!" And from that time the royal couple were seen sitting, like docile children, at the feet of the poor slave; and Nunnia related to them, in benign simplicity, what she knew of her Saviour and his deeds. They swallow her words; their hearts melt, and expand, and inflame. And it is not long before a still more beautiful spectacle presents itself. A missionary appears with a regal crown, and a female witness for Christ, who wears a royal diadem! For it seemed to both as if they could not bless their people with a greater benefit than by preaching to them the precious Gospel of the incarnate God. The king therefore stands, and preaches to the men, and the queen to the females of the land. And the Lord views these two witnesses with delight. The people joyfully receive the good word. Jesus makes his entrance into the cottages and hearts of the savage race, and a new creation blossoms in this dark human desert. Cheerful Christian Churches elevate themselves on the ruins of idol altars, and resound with the loud praises of the grace of Him, who in this case also took charge of his flock himself.

In the present day, renewed vitality begins to pervade these Churches. Courageous missionaries, possessing the unction of the Holy One, here unfold anew the banner of the cross; and it becomes increasingly evident, in an extremely pleasing manner, that the grace, which fifteen hundred years ago so wonderfully planted this vineyard, has by no means forsaken it.

Now, what say you to this event? Is it not lovely, is it not heart-cheering? And what a striking parallel does it present to the history of Naaman! Truly, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever! What a small thing it is to him to help by little or by much! And he knows how to find his sheep. "Though the children of Israel were more in number than the sand on the sea-shore, yet still a remnant shall be saved. I will call them my people, who were not my people; and in the place where it was said, Ye are not my people, shall they be called, Children of the living God."

But, to return to Damascus. Naaman, who, after hearing the words uttered by his captive, hovers on the pinions of hope, has taken his resolution. It is a matter of course that he should follow the indication of the Israelitish maid. "To Samaria!" is the watchword of his heart. He therefore hastens, first of all, to obtain from his prince permission for the journey. This was certainly proper; although, in spiritual journeys to the fountains of Israel, it is not necessary to confer with any one, nor to trouble ourselves about the assent or dissent of those that are without.

Naaman informs his master of what had occurred. "Thus and thus," says he, "said the maid that is of the land of Israel." "Go!" replied Benhadad, in whose estimation every thing depended on the preservation of such a valuable life as that of his field-marshal. Could he have still cherished any hope, that amongst the physicians and

priestly caste of his own land, help might be found for the noble patient, the jealous monarch would not have granted the hated Jewish people the honour of his cure. But he is obliged to be content, and grants the permission, and even offers to give the patient a letter of recommendation, in his own hand-writing, on the way. This royal passport was consequently immediately written out and sealed. The address was, "To Jehoram, king of Israel;" the contents, "When this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman, my servant, to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy." It must be confessed, that the document resembles its writer, and intimates great blindness of heart. He supposes, that if any one in Isreal possesses the power of healing, it can be no other than the noblest according to the flesh, the king of the country; as if the Lord saw as man seeth, and, in the distribution of his gifts and graces, paid regard to the person, and his rank and station; or, as if God bestowed his miraculous gifts in such a manner, that he who was invested with them could act with them, as often as he pleased, as if they were a permanent possession. O the follies and absurdities which always come to light when unenlightened individuals venture upon that region of things, which belongs to the Spirit of God! The wisest of men then often appear as fools, and the most learned become the laughing-stock of children.

After our patient had thankfully accepted the royal letter of recommendation, he hastens to make the further arrangements for his departure. His most sumptuous carriages must be held in readiness, and his finest horses saddled and bridled. His adjutants and armour-bearers are ordered to accompany him, and a host of domestics upon camels terminate the cavalcade. Money for the

journey is likewise not forgotten, and an immense sum is appropriated for that purpose. Ten talents of silver—about sixteen thousand dollars, according to our money—and besides these, six thousand pieces of gold, of which a large proportion is destined to be bestowed upon him who shall succeed in performing the wished-for cure. The ten splendid castans, or festive garments, which Naaman orders to be packed up with the rest of the effects, are also intended for the fortunate individual. Thus princely equipped, the sick hero takes his departure, and hastens along the nearest road to the promised land, the land of his hopes.

It seems, however, to result from this travelling pomp, that Naaman's ideas of spirituality and enlightening were not much superior to those of his royal master. He also probably formed to himself no other idea of "the prophet at Samaria" than that of a kind of magician and priestly conjurer, similar to those in heathen countries. He had not the smallest presentiment of a God, who gratuitously blesses and grants blessings. And certainly, the domestic maxims which are acted upon at the court of Jehovah, are not so very easy to be understood. For instance, that we are the more welcome there, the poorer and emptier we approach, and the more we are desirous of receiving for nought that which we request: this the natural mind cannot at all comprehend. What difficulty there is, before we ourselves, who have become the recipients of Divine grace, sacrifice to this truth our ideas of the necessity of works, meritoriousness, and the like! Ah, we approach the Lord a thousand times like Naaman, loaded with presents, or, if we have none to bring, with vows to present them in the sequel! A thousand times, before we are aware, we again fall upon the foolish idea, that it is ne-

cessary for us, first, to bring something as a present to the Lord, and that then only we are justified in appropriating to ourselves one or other of his promises. We then appear with our prayers, not as Daniel before God, pleading his great mercy; we place our confidence, indeed, according to the phraseology, on the merits of the Surety, but in reality upon our own, although in a very covert and secret manner. But what do we mean by it? Not merely the privilege is given us, but the considerate *command* to "buy wine and milk, without money and without price." This is the decorum which is proper to be observed at Jehovah's throne; let us therefore accommodate ourselves to such a blessed regulation.

II.

Naaman proceeds forward upon his road; Benhadad's passport is of excellent service to him. Wherever he comes, it procures for him, beside a free passage, the most honourable reception. We have also to boast of a similar document, only that it is of an infinitely superior kind, and of more comprehensive validity: it is the document which was bestowed, amongst others, upon the poor sick woman in the Gospel, to whom Jesus said, "Go in peace!" The document, of which the disciples became the possessors, when their Master called out to their enemies, "Let these go!" It is a passport. A passport? Certainly; or have you never heard of a "passport of the children of God?"

We, my dear friends are also on a journey. We hasten forwards. Whether we know it or not, we *fly*. We are carried onwards without pause or cessation. We travel from the cradle. The dying hour is the last stage upon this route. We do not sit, indeed, in any vessel, nor ride upon horses or in chariots; but the wings of time on

which we rest, move more powerfully and rapidly than all these. Every stroke of the bell in the turret points out to us that we have advanced another stage. Yea, every movement of the pendulum reminds us with a solemn sound, that we are travelling. Our path led us, first, through the smiling plains of spring. It seems to us but yesterday. The roses have already bloomed. The leaves will soon turn yellow, and fall rustling to the ground. Then descends the snow, and before we are aware, the flowers of spring again shoot forth, and thus onward and further. Nor does it last long before even the foliage falls from the branches; for all flesh is as grass; "the grass withereth, the flower thereof falleth away." And whither are we travelling? Eternity is the termination of the journey. There the murmuring rivulets of the lives of all mankind disembody themselves; the one to-day, the other to-morrow. But eternity has two receptacles, two provinces, two regions of very different kinds; and a great gulph is fixed between them. The lake of fire and paradise, heaven and hell. At one or other of these, all land. However much we may cruise about, the last wave casts the mariner either on the former or on the latter.

Many misfortunes may befall us on our pilgrimage. We may fall into the hands of terrific powers, succumb under dreadful attacks, suffer arrests, the horrors of which are indescribable. Thousands become ensnared by the deceitfulness of sin, and, enveloped in the folds of this hideous serpent, are squeezed daily more and more closely, until they eternally die and perish in this horrible embrace. Think of Ahab, Judas, and Herod. Satan binds thousands to his yoke, in his fetters, and reserves them in the nets of his lies and delusions, to be tortured in his dungeons. Think of that unhappy race upon whom Jesus pronounced

his awful woe! Thousands fall into the hands of Moses, who brings an action against them, and accuses them, and the charge is ratified by the supreme tribunal, sentence pronounced upon the delinquents, and their names inscribed in the book of the accursed. Thousands are hurled by awakening conscience into the furnaces of despair; and despair is the mark with which the reprobate are branded. Thousands are dragged by the king of terrors, the last enemy, at the bidding of the Omnipotent Judge, into the eternal deserts—to what execution—to what torments! And thousands in the last agony, their eyes turned to the gates of Jerusalem, cry out, “Open unto us, Lord Jesus!” and hear the answer, “I know you not whence ye are—I know you not—I have never known you. Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire!”

These are grievous misfortunes, horrible occurrences. Compared with this, what is every thing that is termed misfortune upon earth? Nothing. What is it in comparison with this, when we lose all our property? Nothing. When we are reduced to beggary? Nothing. When health forsakes us? Nothing. When we are deprived of the esteem of the world? Nothing. When compelled to writhe with pain? Nothing. The latter, compared with the former, is not worth mentioning. It cannot be taken into account. Happy Job, Lazarus, and blind Bartimeus! Your situation is a thousand times preferable to that of the rich man in his purple, to Saul, Herod, or whoever it may be, on his lofty elevation. But is it not possible, we anxiously inquire, to escape these grievous misfortunes and accidents? Certainly my friends, many escape them. By what means? They have a passport. He who travels without the latter, will, doubtless, one day or other, be seized as a vagabond and a criminal, and is lost. But a

passport is a very serviceable thing ; only take care that it be a proper one. No one can make his way here with a false passport. He would only be plunging himself into still greater misery. But many, alas ! travel with false passports ; and, I fear, even many amongst you. These individuals write out their own passports. It is evident, from their boasting of themselves, and saying, "I am not a wicked man ; I give to the poor ; I do what is right." O how will these blind counterfeiters fail of the mark ! The world writes a passport for a second class of persons. It commends such a one as an excellent man, and as one who has deserved well of his citizens and his country. But who commissioned the world to give passports ? Its seal is illegitimate and invalid. Even when thou hast a passport written out by the children of God, who bare thee witness that thou art also a child of God, do not place dependence upon it. How often have even worthy men of God, from shortsightedness and ignorance, unintentionally prepared false passports ! Thou must have thy document from a higher authority, from that which said to the hostile band, "Let these go !" and to the woman, "Go in peace." This woman obtained the true passport, the only valid one, which helps us through every difficulty, and on every occasion, and which all receive who belong to Christ. Let us unfold this estimable document a little further, and inspect its wondrous contents.

Every passport has, first of all, its armorial bearings. If ours possesses them, we are already acquainted with their symbolical form. They consist of a cross, the sign in which we conquer. Upon it shines the inscription, "He has borne our sins in his own body upon the tree ;" together with those other words, "God made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made

the righteousness of God in him." At its feet we perceive broken fetters and shattered chains; significant symbols of great deliverances and victories. Around the tree of the cross a green palm-branch is entwined; the peace of God grew forth from this dry and blood-bedewed wood. Near the cross lie, on one side, a dragon, with its head crushed; on the other, the shattered crown and broken sceptre of the king of terrors. Above the cross is seen the arched rainbow in glittering splendour, the signification of which is already known to you. White and red, green and blue, are the predominating colours. Above the bow we perceive heaven open. Smiling angelic faces are seen in the rosy air, and a little flag hangs out, which seems to me to be of a red colour, showing the words, "Peace on earth; good will to men!" Such are the arms impressed on this wondrous passport; they are mysterious, profound, and heart-cheering, and, in reality, more than the most splendid double-headed eagle or lion; than the proudest crown or the most brilliant sceptre in the armorial bearings of the passports of this world.

Where is the passport of which we speak prepared? Much depends upon this; for passports are of so much the greater value, the more powerful the state whose seal they bear. The passport of the children of God bears a magnificent stamp, that of the most glorious and mighty kingdom in the wide world. Where was it written out? In the supreme cabinet. Wherewith? The writing is red. The blood of the Lamb was the ink. On what was it written? On incorruptible parchment. By whom? Written and subscribed by the Almighty God himself, the Lord of all lords. He could not, indeed, have written out a passport for a sinful child of Adam, without anything further. For the transgressor might deservedly and justly

have been arrested and delivered into the hands of the destroyer. But security was given for such characters. The Son undertook to present the dishonest to the Father as honest, and those that were worthy of death, as innocent. He paid the debt. He took their curse upon himself, and suffered himself to be cast into the hell they well deserved. He fulfilled, in their name, what was obligatory upon them, and thus wrought out an obedience for them, without which a security against perdition and an inheriting of eternal life was out of the question. Thus he fulfilled, in their stead, and for them, the eternal and irrevocable conditions of salvation, and thus rendered it possible, not only for grace and mercy to write out such a passport, but even for Divine holiness and justice to sign it in legible characters. And certainly, grace alone would never have partially signed it. God therefore wrote out the passport, the gracious and righteous God. He wrote it on the basis of the bloody merits of the great Surety.

Let us consider this glorious document still further, and direct our attention to the description of the holder of the passport. The same divisions as in the passports of this world are observable; but the details sound somewhat differently, and, in part, mysteriously.

NAME: Jedidjah, the Lord's favourite.

AGE: is differently stated to that in human registers.

PARENTAGE: God is his father; his mother, the Jerusalem that is above.

BIRTH-PLACE: The foot of Mount Sinai.

PLACE OF RESIDENCE: Mount Zion.

RANK: Priest and king.

OCCUPATION: At one time a warrior, at another a performer on the harp.

ESCORT: The Holy Spirit.

OBJECT OF THE JOURNEY : The enjoyment of that which Jesus has procured.

MODE OF TRAVELLING : On eagles' wings.

UNIFORM : A coat without a seam.

LANGUAGE : The Galilean dialect.

FIGURE : Beautiful in the sight of God.

EYES : Enlightened.

EAR : Open to the Word of God.

MOUTH : Anointed for the confession of the name of Jesus.

PARTICULAR MARKS .—Well, what follows now ? Perfect holiness ? uninterrupted unction ? continual devotion ? Under this head, only one thing is noted down ; but this is never wanting in these passports : decided hostility in the inmost mind to sin, and a heartfelt inclination to love God in Christ Jesus !

To what place therefore is the passport addressed ? We look at it, and read, "*Proceeding to Jerusalem.*" Jerusalem is the city of the great king. How fair art thou, O Jerusalem ! How brightly dost thou shine ! How sweet are the notes of praise, which are there listened to in sweet repose. O joy and delight ! the sun now rises, and the day dawns, which shall never terminate ! O that this were already the case ! Hail, thou city of our hopes, we salute thee with longing eyes and aching hearts ! How often does the soul tremble with impatience at the sweet sound of thy name ! There all suffering and conflict will for ever cease. Faith there is turned to sight, and hope to enjoyment. There is no longer any coming or going there, no complaining nor desponding. No darkness ; but eternal and unclouded light. No privation ; but superabundant and inexhaustible plenitude. O how shall we feel, thou city of our God, when thy gates shall at length close behind us ! "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem ! let my right hand forget her cunning."

“To Jerusalem,” that is, valid until the bearer reaches that place, and enters within its gates. And who uttered this? The Almighty on the throne of glory. O what validity does the superscription by this means acquire! It is now no longer a mere favour and permission, but a command, a decree, and an ordinance. It is just as if a king, who was desirous of seeing a troop of soldiers escorted safely and on carriages to some particular place, should give them, for this purpose, a document, the contents of which were, “The direct road to —,” or whatever the place might be called; and signed below, “The King,” and accompanied by the royal seal; this would not be saying, “They have *permission* to travel thither;” but “They *must* proceed to the place specified;” and how would the authorities on the way, vie with each other to expedite and accelerate the transport in every possible manner! Thus it is also with the royal direction, “To Jerusalem!” in the passports of the children of God. A human king might indeed make known his will, but could not pledge himself that it would really be fulfilled. For he has no command over storms, inundations, maladies, and other hindrances, which might present themselves on the march along the roads. But he who writes out the passports of Israel, rules over all. If he therefore writes, “Valid as far as Jerusalem,” we shall assuredly reach the place. Whatever may occur and oppose itself, the pledge of our arrival there is contained in these words; and all things must facilitate our passage, even against their will. And though our path lie over cloud-clapped mountains, and roaring oceans, yet we shall certainly arrive in safety. We cannot miss the mark, but shall cast anchor, however stormy the passage may have been, in Jerusalem.

But which are, finally, the orders and instructions contained in this blessed document? for as you well know,

no passport is devoid of them. You have certainly often read, "We request all the civil and military authorities," and even, "We enjoin you to suffer the bearer of this passport, who has legitimated himself as being unsuspected, to travel without let or hindrance, and in case of need to grant him every assistance and protection." Similar are the instructions contained in the passport of which we are speaking. They are threefold. As far as they are addressed to the holy angels, it is said, "Bear him upon your hands, lest he dash his foot against a stone." With reference to all the hostile powers which are in the world, it is said, "Let this man go; and whatever ye do to him, do it for his good!" and with regard to the holder of the passport himself, its language is, "Be of good cheer, fear not, go in peace!" and the angels obey with delight, and the enemies from necessity; for the commands of God are compulsory; and the possessor of the passport is a fool, if he does not anoint his head, and leave caring and grieving to others.

The passport is indeed written out for many a one, who is himself ignorant of it. He carries it sealed up about with him, and is unacquainted with its precious contents. But the document will do its duty, even under cover, and procure a free passage. But it is a twofold favour, to be conscious of possessing the document, and to be able to read it. Let him that is so, treat it as it deserves. If Moses, or the devil, or thy conscience accuse thee, do not enter into disputation with them. Instead of reflecting what excuse to make, cut the matter short, hold up thy passport in the face of the inquisitors, and resolutely request them to countersign it. Thou wilt see how they will retreat, perplexed and mute: they mistook thee: and thus thou art permitted to go forward joyfully and without molestation.

III.

Our travellers have proceeded a day's journey or two upon their way, when the mountains of Israel dawn before them in the azure distance. O in what a different light does our hero now behold them lying before him, to that in which he viewed them on former occasions, when he approached them at the head of his martial legions! and when, from a distance, in haughty reveries on his war-horse, he selected those of the heights on which his victorious banners should float. He now greets them with a feeling as if they were his home, and with the salutations of tender affection. He sees the land opening before him in the hazy distance, like a quiet well-protected harbour. All his hopes spring up between those hills. He would gladly kiss his hand to them as he travels on his way. He is now also about to elevate a standard upon the soil of Israel; but one on which the words are to be inscribed, "The Lord is my help." In that region a battle is also again to be fought, a battle in which Naaman's idols shall fall, and he himself be subdued by Jehovah. Nor shall he this time leave the field without his booty; but the booty will be such, as will endure unto everlasting life. As formerly, so now also, there will be songs of victory and notes of triumph; but they will be such as will be re-echoed in heaven itself, and in which the angels of God will joyfully mingle their voices. The warrior has indeed no presentiment of anything of the kind. A source of bodily restoration is all that he seeks, and all that he hopes for. But God intends greater things for him. The pinions of boundless mercy bear him towards a paradise, the joys of which will never fade.

The borders of Canaan are crossed. What are now the patient's feelings! A thrill of anticipating joy per-

vades every limb. It seems to him as if the gloomy region of sorrow and mourning lay for ever behind him, and that a blissful and wondrous region had received him. In a state of mind, bordering on devotion, he enters the promised land. His route leads him first along the foot of a lofty chain of mountains towards the lake of Gennesaret, near Capernaum and Bethsaida, and then, past them, down into the plain of Jezreel. In a short time, Samaria, the lofty situated residence of the king of Israel, the end of his journey, shows itself in the distance. No city in the world ever glittered more brilliantly in the eyes of our hero. He sees it before him in the rosy light of hope. Without stopping, he proceeds towards it with a beating heart; but I leave it to others to describe the sensations, which at length accompany him through the gate of the city.

No sooner has Naaman entered Samaria, than his first concern is, to inform king Jehoram of his arrival and of the object of his journey. A messenger is despatched to the royal palace. After the audience, which the latter had solicited in the name of his master, is willingly granted by Jehoram, Naaman, accompanied by his retinue, and with his head muffled up, sets out on the way to His Israelitish Majesty, appears before his throne, and does not delay, after duly observing the customary ceremonies, most reverentially to present to him the introductory letter of his sovereign. Jehoram, not a little startled at this unexpected and enigmatical visit, breaks open the seal, and reads, "When this letter is come unto thee, behold I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy." But the monarch changes colour, even during the perusal, and scarcely has he arrived at the close, when with gestures, in which the strangest mixture of rage and embarrassment is visible,

he hurls the note away from him, rends his royal robes in token of his indignation, and exclaims with a vehemence, which appears strange to all around, "Am I a God, to kill and make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? Wherefore, consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me!"

In reality an amusing scene! What needless apprehension! What groundless and superfluous passion; as if he himself were to work the miracle! But who does not perceive, that in the singular behaviour of the indignant monarch, there is also much that is pleasing? How should we rejoice, if similar requests made to you, called forth similar feelings in you, and that as often as it was said to you, 'Take heed to your sanctification and salvation, you fell into the same passion as Jehoram, and were carried away by similar feelings of indignation and embarrassment, which induced you to exclaim, "Am I a God to accomplish such things?"' If, in Benhadad's letter, the blind heathen is so fully manifest, Jehoram's heartfelt effusion characterises, in a remarkable manner, the Israelite, though deeply fallen, yet not entirely separated from his people. For he not only knows that leprosy, being an evil of Divine infliction, can be removed solely by an immediate act of the Almighty, and that therefore the healing of a leper might be esteemed fully equal to the raising of a person from the dead; on which account he exclaims, "Am I God, to kill and make alive!" and although he had devoted himself, like his fathers, to the worship of the golden calves, yet, in his inmost soul, he is also well aware that Jehovah is God, and that, in Jehovah's eyes, there is not a greater and more culpable abomination than that of robbing him of his glory, in order, whilst deifying

the creature to transfer it to a mere man. He is therefore unable to prevent feeling greatly terrified at the thought that such a request should be made to him, which, according to his inmost conviction, ought only to be made to the living God. Are not you astonished to meet with so much truth and genuine Israelitishness even in Jehoram? But afterwards reflect, what a plenitude of Divine light the Lord had shed upon the people of his possession. The celestial odour of saving knowledge streamed through the land to such a degree, that even the most filthy vessel, often unconsciously, received something of its perfume. The river of Divine wisdom and revelation flowed so powerfully and boundlessly along, that its waves beat over even into the remotest retreats of darkness and sin. King Jehoram presents a striking confirmation of this; for, with all the reflection of superior knowledge which shone upon him, he was still a miserable being, when regarded in the light; and this he evidences by the distrustful apprehension, which, without any reason, he inwardly imbibes from the letter of Benhadad, as if the latter merely sought occasion to attack him afresh; an apprehension which ought not to have been able, at least in such a degree, to overpower the heart of the man who had already seen such mighty proofs that Israel possessed a keeper who never slumbered, and who was able to break the teeth in the jaws of the lion of the north. But Jehoram's spiritual deformity is still more apparent in the perplexity which he manifests in the presence of the afflicted Syrian, since he acts as if no leper had ever been healed in Israel; nay, as if, in the whole history of his people, not a single gracious and delivering act of the Almighty had occurred, which could afford Naaman any ground to hope; since it does not even once occur to him that there is a prophet living

in his kingdom, of whose miraculous power he had already had personal experience. So far had the ungrateful monarch succeeded in banishing this man of God, together with his miracle, out of his remembrance. You see, therefore, that what still betrays the son of Israel in the king is only a slight tinge, which even Jehoram cannot entirely lay aside; but in other respects, he presents himself to us as a despicable being, an apostate, without faith, without a consciousness of any spiritual necessities, and entirely destitute of all true life.

Jehoram's embarrassment at the request of the Syrian fills us with indignation. Let us turn, however, the weapons against ourselves. How often do we hazard in a similar manner, I might say, for a mere trifle, the honour of God, and of that kingdom to which we belong! The slightest mishap, or the most insignificant intricacy in our lives, makes us present an appearance as if we had been imposed upon and miserably deceived by the Lord and his promises. It was an excellent expression, and worthy of being taken to heart, which I heard one Christian brother make use of to another, who told him, with a shrug of the shoulders and bitter ill-temper, how long the Lord had suffered him to want even the most needful sustenance. "Stay," replied the former; "we must not be so ready to give the Lord a bad name, nor immediately spread it abroad, if he ever seems to act harshly and strangely towards us." It is true. Our spiritual loyalty ought to be more refined than to suffer us, even in the most inscrutable dispensation that may befall us, to put on such looks as might bring the good city of Jerusalem into discredit with others. Instead of immediately sounding the alarm when any strange thing happens to us, we ought, on the contrary, to feel ourselves impelled, by a Divine jealousy, to

boast of the manifestations of grace and faithfulness which we have experienced. The idea, that we might give others occasion to think lightly of the land of promise and its agreeable things, ought to make us tremble, and, wherever one of the two is unavoidable, we ought to be infinitely more inclined to bring up an evil report of ourselves, than of the territories of that kingdom whose citizens we are become. We have also infinitely more to relate, from the book of our experience, of help and mercy than of adverse events, and our complaints of the latter are sure to terminate in bitter confusion before the Lord. For what else are the enigmas of our guidance which are so frequently able to astonish and confuse us beyond measure, than mysterious and only seemingly discordant preludes to the stupendous harmonies of the Divine procedure, which will inevitably follow? The name of the Lord continues eternally glorious in Israel, in spite of all the singularities attendant upon his providential guidance, and always rises above every obscuring cloud in the end, with a radiance and a glory only the more bright and brilliant.

But what must now become of our invalid, the poor man, who had arrived at Samaria so full of hope, and who now saw himself so suddenly stripped of all his pleasing expectations? Benhadad knew not how to help him, any more than the Syrian physicians and magicians; and now that he comes to Jehoram, this only star that had still inspired him with courage and hope in the night of his sorrow, the latter appears suddenly like a man in despair, and confesses that he is unable to help, or to point out any one who is able. This was a painful situation for Naaman. But be patient, my friends, be patient! It was necessary that it should come to this, that the place might be prepared for the Lord, on which he could glorify his name and

manifest his power. The period is arrived in which Elisha can stand forth and obviously prove that his Lord is God, and not Baal, nor any other. The world is now evidently unable to help, and there is no one left who can render assistance, with the exception of this simple and despised man. And the intention of this is, that there may be finally cause for rejoicing, and that the God whom Elisha adores may be glorified.

When the world is no longer able to afford help or comfort, it becomes apparent that the little church of God upon earth is not so despicable as is generally supposed. How pleasing, under such circumstances, may the affection of a believing Christian be, and his faithfulness; how desirable his discourse, which is then felt to be more precious than a world full of gold and silver! Where the jurisdiction of human art and assistance terminates, the sphere of the ability and activity of true Christians commences. When the sun of earthly power and glory sets, the children of God rise as lovely stars in the darkness. Where kings and princes shrug up their shoulders, and are obliged to confess that they know of no remedy, the former lift up their hands in their closets, and procure from heaven what the world is no longer able to afford; and where troubles overwhelm a heart, which neither the wisdom of the wise, nor the sagacity of the men of understanding can remove, they approach with the balm of the Word of their God, and the wounds cicatrize, and an eternal cure is accomplished. The sources of help and consolation from whence they derive their supplies are never exhausted. The Lord is their strength; who will overpower it? God acts through them, and they through him. He is the source and spring of their works, they his instruments and channels.

XII.

THE BEGGAR'S BADGE.

“THROUGH death unto life”—this is the law of the kingdom of heaven. “He that loses his life shall find it.” A day of penitence precedes the day of exaltation. John stands at the gate of the sanctuary of grace, and exclaims, “Bring forth fruits meet for repentance.” (Matt. iii. 8.) But the Sunday coat does not constitute such a day of penitence, any more than the going to church, the downward inclination of the head, or an assumed expression of countenance. When is a day of repentance celebrated in the proper manner? I will tell you. It is, then, first of all, my friends, when the proper bells usher in the solemnity. And which are they? the bells of our church, or of the whole town? It would be well if this were the case. We would ring them day and night till the tongues of them glowed, and the ropes broke. The true bells hang on high, indeed, but in no stone-built tower. They give a clear sound; but they are not made of metal. No mortal hand puts them in motion; they ring of themselves, or else not at all. Where do they hang? High above the stars; in the Divine counsel of grace. When it is there said, “Such a one shall weep at my feet,” the true bells are then rung, and a day of penitence and repentance is solemnized upon earth. Saul no longer kicks against the pricks; Nebuchadnezzar becomes a writhing worm; and the king of Nineveh sits in sackcloth and in ashes.

But when is a day of penitence of the proper kind cele-

brated? I reply further, when the true church is thrown open. The true church—is that the building in which we are assembled? Would that it were! But I am afraid that the present day again shows us, that its doors being open constitutes no day of penitence. The church that I mean is contained within thee. It is thy heart. O, how is it closed by nature! What a dreadful bar has the evil one drawn before it! There is no want of those who attend this church. We preachers send out many every Sunday, with directions to enter the church. Those who thus attend the church are the sayings of the living God, the words of eternal truth; such as, “Awake, thou that sleepest;” “Deliver thy soul;” “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ;” “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” These and similar passages, we send with a mission into the midst of you, and say to them, “Enter into the temple of this or that unconverted individual’s heart,” and they go forth; but when they reach you, they find, indeed, your bodily ear open, or at most, the cellar door of your memory and understanding, in the coldness of which they freeze to death; whilst the temple of your heart is fast closed, and is inwardly dead and desolate, and only a flock of night-birds, such as unbelief, error, the love of the world, and sin, horde together there, like so many spectres and frightful phantoms. How gladly would we open the gates to these worthy guests, the passages of Divine truth, that they might expel the vile rabble. But however we may attempt to make an opening, whether knocking violently, with the hammer or the axe—whether gently, with the golden keys of entreaty and exhortation—it is all in vain; it is not the work of man. Another must perform it, even he who opened the heart of Lydia. Lydia then gave heed to the things which

were spoken of Paul; the admonitions, doctrines, and instructions of the apostle then broke into Lydia's heart, as if by storm.

But when does the day of penitence arrive? I reply, lastly, when the true preacher appears. And who is he? Is it myself, or some other? No, nor even Paul, Peter, nor John. Even these are unable of themselves to bring about a day of penitence. There is only one who can effect it—a Preacher from on high. How does he appear? Clothed in light. Is he learned? He searched all things, even the deep things of God. Is he eloquent? His tongue utters sparks, flashes, and flames. Is he strong and powerful? Powerful enough to melt, with one breath, an adamant heart. The preacher is the blessed Comforter, the Spirit from on high.

Such a day of penitence and humiliation occurs likewise in the history we are considering. It seems as if I already heard the true bells ringing, and saw the proper key in the lock of the temple of the heart, and the right preacher proceeding to the pulpit. Come, follow me to the festival.

2 KINGS v. 8—10.

“And it was so, when Elisha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.

“So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha.

“And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again unto thee, and thou shalt be clean.”

Naaman is arrived in Samaria. The last scene of which we were witnesses, occurred in the palace of the

Israelitish king. Naaman presented the letter of introduction and recommendation from his monarch, and you remember with what singular astonishment Jehoram read the words, "When this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy." With a rage which threatened to trouble the lustre of his majesty, he rent his robes, and broke out, like a maniac, into the exclamation, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me, to recover a man of his leprosy? Wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me!"

Let us now attend to the further development of the narrative. Three points claim our particular attention at this time: **THE CONDUCT OF ELISHA**; **THE JOURNEY TO JERICHO**; AND **THE DIRECTIONS GIVEN BY THE PROPHET**. Let us consider them a little more closely.

I.

The state of things presents no very promising appearance with reference to our invalid. Ah, was the intimation given by the Israelitish maid only a delusion? Did fancy only picture prospects to the poor man, which the reality was to destroy? He has now reached the end of his journey; but — O deplorable event! — the whole journey seems in vain. He is actually obliged to reflect whether he heard the words of Jehoram waking, or only in a dream. What! is there no help, even in Israel? O, horrible! His last hope now withers away. But only have patience, only be still! The worse that things apparently now stand with regard to the invalid, so much the better, I might say, do they stand for the Lord. It was necessary that the world, with its wisdom art, and aid, should previously be put to shame. The reason is obvious. When

the Divine aid appeared, after this shipwreck, it was so much the more quickly recognized as such, and the glory was secured to the Lord, which is due unto his name.

The report of the arrival of the distinguished stranger in Samaria, and that which occurred in the royal palace, soon spread itself through the land of Israel. The intelligence penetrated even to Jericho, and into the cottage of Elisha. When the latter heard how the king had acted towards the heathen who sought help of him, an unspeakable indignation seized him. The honour of God was his bride. To see it insulted, is a dagger to his heart. "Prince," thinks the prophet, "thou no longer knowest that there is a living God in Israel, and yet the foundations of thy throne are laid in the wonders of his hand. Thou who art the ruler of a country, which is every where strewed with memorials of the power and goodness of Jehovah, givest this country up to the blasphemies of the heathen, as if the springs were likewise dry here, when exhausted in other parts, and as if there were no longer any help to be procured, when the idol and his priests know of none." Such are his thoughts whilst burning with holy jealousy. Let him be despised as much as people please; it is all the same to him. But let the honour of his Lord, and that of his native land, be left unfringed upon by him who has any regard for his friendship. It is here that he is the most susceptible; whoever touches him here, rouses a lion. Noble susceptibility! admirable ardour! sacred patriotism!

The zeal of the prophet turns into action. He hastens to despatch a messenger to the metropolis, who has orders to appear before the monarch, and to say to him, "Elisha sends to thee, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? Let the stranger come to me, that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel." Powerful language!

Brilliant act of the man of God ! He breaks forth from the clouds of his concealment, like the sun, after all the stars of human ability and wisdom had in vain united their beams to brighten the night of the Syrian's life. His words are certainly lofty, and sound proudly. But they may well do so. They are not mere wind. They have reality for their basis. Let people rend their clothes in other lands, but in Israel it is blasphemy. The kingdom of Jehovah is no beggarly state. Noble is the national feeling of the man of God ! We partake of it with regard to our kingdom. Banner of Zion, wave proudly and sublimely ! Under thy shadow it is not as elsewhere. Come to us, when thou art anxious for aid and counsel. What the world has not, we possess. Dost thou seek truth ? Do not doubtingly inquire what and where it is. It exists ; it is found ! Its torch is in our hands. Dost thou desire peace ? rend not thy garments when the wastes of human wisdom do not offer it to thee. These wastes are not the universe. Come to our meadows—there flows its stream—there breathe its gentle whispers. Its righteousness the blessing of which thou art in quest ? Courage, courage, even when the bondage under the yoke of the law has failed to afford it thee. In *our* country, the heavens rain down righteousness ; and what righteousness ? The righteousness of God. Light is the garment which is here allotted thee. Is it an overcoming power to sustain the toils of life, or to meet the horrors of death, which is the object of thy pursuit ? The public stalls of human intelligence do not afford it thee. But be it so. It is not yet the time to despair. Come to Salem, and we assure thee whatever opposes thee, thou shalt see laid as a footstool at thy feet ; aye, examine thy inmost necessities, give utterance to thy most secret wishes, and give way to them, however bold

they may be; we promise thee within the boundaries of our kingdom, superabundant satisfaction and satiety. Here the effects of poverty have an end. Heaven here pours out its plenitude. Here are the boundary stones of all sorrow: "Ho, therefore, every one that thirsteth, come! Why do ye spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Come hither to us, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness."

II.

Elisha's messenger arrives at Samaria, hastens to the royal palace, appears before the king, and executes his commission. Jehoram receives the intelligence well pleased. He feels that it delivers him from a secret perplexity, and this easily takes off the edge from Elisha's message. He sends word to the sick warrior, that there dwells a prophet at Jericho, to whom he had better apply. No wooden guide-post ever did more desirable service than this. Naaman's joy at the un hoped-for intelligence is indescribable. The message sounds to him like the stroke of the oars of an approaching life-boat, to a ship-wrecked mariner amidst the roaring of the waves, and as the sound of a deliverer's voice to one who is buried deep in the shaft of a mine, calling him by name. "The little maid of Damascus," thinks he, "spoke also of a prophet;" and his feelings may have been similar to those of the wise men of the east, when leaving the gates of Jerusalem, on again beholding that star beaming upon them, which was to guide them to the object of their hopes and desires. The creation of his delightful anticipations, already trodden down, and lamentably faded, has suddenly sprung up again in its brightest colours under the mild and vernal

shower of good tidings; and his confidence in a speedy deliverance is now more certain and joyful than it had been before.

In all our undertakings, whatever may be their aim, every thing depends upon their being of God's ordering and impelling; for when this is the case, we can never fail of our aim. As many of us as belong to Christ, are on a journey, like Naaman, and not only to that city which hath foundations, but also to many other objects of various kinds. We preachers are travelling towards a blessing, which is promised to our words. You that are needy in Zion, wish to see yourselves and your families fed and clothed by the Lord, because that is promised you, which he does to the birds and the lillies. You that are oppressed, are waiting for the moment when you will be enabled to exchange your sorrow and mourning for songs of rejoicing; for "light is sown for the righteous." Ye parents, in whose believing breasts God has excited the hope of seeing your children at length bound up with you in the bundle of life, are proceeding forwards to meet the glad and festive moment, when you will be able to say with exultation, Lo, here we are, O Lord! and all whom thou hast given us!

Thus we march forwards—the one to this aim, the other to that, and the Lord has given the signal for these journeys; and the word and promise of God have put us in motion. Do not doubt, my brethren, but that we shall attain the object of our journey: most probably, however, in a similar manner to Naaman; all the saints have been compelled to travel upon this path. A hundred times shall we see our prospects close before us; but a hundred times do they afterwards unfold themselves so much the more brightly. A hundred times it will seem as if our

hopes were for ever blasted; but equally as often will these benignant stars again break through the clouds in greater lustre. And finally, in spite of every red sea, and hostile force, Moses at length stands upon the mount, of which it had once been said unto him, "On this mountain shalt thou offer sacrifice." The confession of Joshua will at length be forced from us also to the glory of God, "Ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you."

Scarcely has Naaman received the joyful intelligence of Elisha's message, than orders are issued to his attendants to make immediate preparations for continuing the journey. The camels and horses are again hastily harnessed, the carriages attached to them, and in a few minutes, the oriental cavalcade, moves forward again amid the pressure of the gaping multitude, through the streets of Samaria. "They are going to Jericho," it is said in one quarter. "But will the prophet heal him?" is the language in another part. "Yes," thinks Naaman, "he will," and sits in his carriage more pleased than ever he had sat in it after gaining a victory.

The journey is soon terminated. Naaman's first inquiry at the gate of the city, is after the residence of the prophet. Now there was not in Jericho a child in the streets, who did not know the man of God, nor mention his name without affection and respect. By the healing of the waters, Elisha had excited the most heartfelt gratitude of the whole city, and the warrior on entering it, would doubtless receive the joyful assurance from many quarters, that if he came to seek help of the man of God for his malady, he might rely upon it with certainty, that he had not undertaken the long journey in vain.

The expectation of the invalid is excited to the utmost. "Where does he dwell," may he have thought, "and how does he look—the wondrous man!" and many other ideas of the kind may have suggested themselves to him on the way. On a sudden the exclamation is heard, "Halt, we are at the spot!" "What, is this the place?" asks Naaman, with a surprise, bordering on astonishment, "is it in this miserable hut that I shall find the man who is to afford me that aid for which I applied in vain to the whole world, and to the most eminent priests and physicians?"

He asks himself the question, and a dreadful storm of fury, vexation, and despair, begins to rise in his soul. The worthy soldier seems not yet to have any idea that impotence alone requires decoration and outward splendour, in order to conceal itself behind them; but that power makes itself known in the simplest manner by itself; that what is unsubstantial, when it seeks to pass for something, is obliged to blind the people and bribe their imaginations by arraying itself in glittering and tinsel adornment; whilst that which possesses intrinsic worth and substance may despise everything that is extraneous, and does so not to its disadvantage. And there are many other things of which Naaman appears to have no presentiment; but one thing after another will present itself to his notice, and occasion a complete revolution in the world of his conceptions—a revolution, such as every one experiences, who like him, is brought out of the kingdom of darkness and lies, and approaches that of light and truth.

If the meanness of Elisha's habitation caused offence to Naaman, how much more the strange and unexpected behaviour of the prophet! The invalid had doubtless imagined that he would no sooner have arrived with his splendid retinue before the door of the wonder-worker, than the

latter would reverentially hasten out to him, and offer his services to him. But everything falls out different to what the hero had anticipated according to the style and etiquette of his own country. The prophet is well aware who it is that has halted at his threshold; but the circumstance seems to operate little upon him. As if it were a matter of no importance whatever, of which he is informed, he keeps himself quietly retired in his cottage; and does not even once step to the window to look at the remarkable cavalcade. The only thing he deigns to do, is to send out a messenger to Naaman, probably Gehazi, who is commissioned briefly to tell him, what he has to observe, in order to be rid of his plague.

This conduct appears certainly the more strange, the less such a dignified reserve lay in the vocation and character of Elisha, the representative of the Divine condescension. But Elisha knows well, what he is doing; and his whole deportment, though it bears the impress of no inconsiderable self-sufficiency and even pride, manifests only the high degree of his wisdom in the treatment of souls, as well as his delicate tact in protecting the interests of his Lord and God. The dignified stranger must at the outset become conscious that he has not to do here with a Syrian juggler or idolatrous priest, but with the servant of a majesty, which is no respecter of persons, and before which, human ideas of great and little, high and low, vanish into nothing; that the difference which ermine occasions in the world and the labourer's jacket, has no existence in the eyes of him before whom they are all sinners, and come short of the glory which they ought to have in sight; that the splendour of high rank, high sounding titles, and glittering crowns of honour, may indeed be included amongst the things, which dust and ashes may have some reason

to regard, as a covering for their misery and nakedness : but to that God, who does not take the appendages into his scale, but the man without the outer case, it is only a specious vapour, and affords anything but a claim upon his favour ; that therefore he, Naaman, must not believe that, because of his dignified rank, he has the smallest precedence above any one else in the sight of this God, but may hope for the Lord's help, solely because Jehovah is a God of Grace, and is willing of his free favour to show mercy to sinners.

These and similar ideas Elisha wished, if possible, deeply to impress upon the mind of his dignified guest ; and hence we see him, in holy renunciation of his otherwise friendly and obliging deportment, assume that mode of behaviour which conveyed above all things a humbling idea to the stranger, similar to that contained in the words, "Stand at a distance and draw thy shoe from off thy foot, for the place on which thou standest is holy," and less of the mild light of loving-kindness than the splendour of the majesty of him, whose representative the prophet was ordained to be. O in what an extremely venerable light does the dear man of God again present himself to our view ! O that we preachers of the present day might venture to contemplate ourselves in this living mirror ! Does not an annihilating judgment pass upon us from the example of Elisha, which we alas ! bring upon ourselves by the manner in which we discharge our pastoral duties, since it might seem, that the Lord, whose interpreters and stewards we are, thought like men, and paid considerable regard to rank, station, property, and the like, and looked very differently upon a nobleman, a man in office, or one of immense wealth, than upon people of the fourth, fifth, or sixth class. People, however, do not generally think

of regarding us as the representatives of God and his mind and will. This is the well-deserved reward, which our unworthy parassiticalness with respect to the higher ranks, brings us. Even those in whose presence we so well know how with time-serving cowardice to strike the sails of serious truth, will only despise us in their hearts, however much they may praise and commend us for being "civil people." O that the Lord from heaven might compassionate our case, powerfully check the despicable harlotry of his poor servants, and establish them on that footing of the prophets and apostles, viewed from whence, that which is termed the magic of superior station in life, evaporates into a mere nonentity!

Elisha wished for nothing more ardently than that it might be granted him to invest his guest with the sacred badge of beggary. It was no malicious intention which suggested the idea to him, but true charity, for he was acquainted with the words of promise contained in the seventy-second psalm, according to which, the Lord "will deliver the needy"—that is the beggar—"when he crieth." Holy mendicity! This seems indeed not to agree well together. Every one is terrified at the thought of beggary. No one goes willingly into the poor-house. The son of the dust is indeed dreadfully poor by nature, utterly destitute, nothing is left of him of spiritual blessings; but of this he is ignorant, and refuses to hear of it. He is unwilling to be poor, and seeks to be rich. He wishes to live upon his own capital, and to expend his own money, so as to say with the Pharisee, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are," &c.; and with the young ruler, "What lack I yet?" He is willing to wear a sword, and a feather in his hat, and to carry a walking-stick; but the beggar's badge!—how does he look askaunt

at those, who are obliged to wear it ! How opposed to the natural man are all the expressions concerning living upon grace, relying upon the merits of another, and casting ourselves into the arms of mercy ! And if we come to him with such speeches as, the dogs eating of the crumbs which fall from their master's table, taking refuge in the wounds of Jesus, embracing his feet, &c., he runs away in a rage. It is intolerable to him to hear anything of the kind. Ridiculous beggarly pride ! Singular blindness ! But such is man. Self-love plays him sad tricks. And although so dreadfully poor, do you suppose that we can bring him to see his true situation, or that fate is able to undeceive him with respect to himself, or that even sin can effect it ? O by no means ! We may talk ourselves out of breath, in order to convince him, that he possesses neither righteousness, nor strength, nor wisdom ; he will spit upon us with rage, but attach no credence to our statements. Be assured of this. Fate may scourge him with rods, and misfortune after misfortune accumulate upon him. What will he do ? Break out into open murmuring against God, and ask with bitter feelings, by what he has deserved such afflictions : but not humble himself, nor once think, that he is justly and deservedly treated thus. The sins of his life may lie mountains high before him ; abominations of the grossest kind, which he has committed, may surround him, but even sin will not make him a sinner. He will know how to excuse himself with his good intentions or some other reason ; but the register of his guilt will not bring him to a state of beggary ; in chains, in the house of correction, and even upon the scaffold, he will maintain that he is an honest man.

It is true that much can be made of a man by teaching, education, example, correction, and punishment ; but yet

we cannot make a poor sinner of him. This is a task, of which no mortal—and were it even a Paul, or a John—is capable. Self-righteousness and self-love are the toughest goblins that can be met with. If thou cut off one of the dragon's heads, ten new ones immediately grow in its place. It laughs at thy weapons, it esteems iron as straw. Bring forth a whole army into the field, composed of texts of Scripture and words of exhortation, of philosophical proofs, of faults which the individual has committed, of judgments, misfortunes, and of whatever thou pleasest; and let this host march with fixed bayonets upon the son of Adam; he will nevertheless maintain the field. Thou mayest turn him mad with rage and vexation; but thou wilt not humble him, nor make him become a poor sinner. No, nor could even an angel accomplish it. It is a gigantic undertaking, which only One can perform—only One.

And who is that? The living God alone. Of him therefore it is said with reason, "He giveth repentance unto Israel." The badges of spiritual beggary come from heaven. The Almighty distributes them. "A splendid dowry," say you. In reality, a better one than your bars of gold and silver, aye, and even than princely sceptres and regal crowns. A time is coming, when the children of Belial will also see this. The insignia of royalty are only mouldering dust. A beggar's badge glitters in the arms of supreme nobility. And yet no one—as already observed—no one voluntarily takes it. God is obliged to force it upon him who is to wear it. How does God do this? As it pleases him. He is no uniform God. He does not make everything upon one and the same last. Generally, however, he employs Moses in this work. Him he sends to such an individual, and places him in intercourse and commercial connexion with him. Moses

offers him salvation in the name of God. The man asks what the blessing costs? The dealer replies, "A perfect fulfilment of my commands." The purchaser thinks it not too much, and agrees to pay the price. The Holy Spirit interferes, and explains to him the requirements of Moses in their true sense. The man revises his moral cash; and the result is—that he is horror-struck. His capital of virtue is by no means sufficient to furnish the quantum of the purchase-money. But he must necessarily have the possession. He wishes eventually to go to heaven, and not to hell. The creditor is urgent. "Have patience a little longer," says the debtor, "and I will pay thee the uttermost farthing!" and now he begins to toil and labour, and run hither and thither. The commandments must be kept. But alas! the more earnestly he strives to do so, the more profound the conviction, that he is going backwards instead of forwards; that he daily falls deeper into debt, and only becomes poorer instead of richer, and increases the debt instead of diminishing it. Moses threatens him, and says, "Pay, or thou art damned." The debtor inquires with a sigh, whether he will not abate something of his demand? "Nothing," is the harsh and definite answer; "nothing, not a jot?" The anxiety of the poor creature reaches its height, renewed efforts only produce renewed falls, and the conviction, that it is in vain. Moses continues to thunder, reproach, and curse. At length the poor terrified man breaks down like a reed, exclaiming, "I can do no more, I am bankrupt, I have not wherewith to pay! O wretched man that I am, I feel that I am accursed! What shall I do to be saved?" — "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," exclaims a voice from on high into his soul, "and thou shalt be saved!" "Jesus Christ, who is he?" what can he

offer? May a sinner, a slave of Satan, a child of death, such as I, hope any thing from him?" He asks the question, hears the Gospel of peace, and listens to the doctrine of the cross. The star of a gracious hope then arises upon his night of sorrow. He sees himself cast upon Jesus; Jesus is his only hope. "Lord Jesus, have mercy upon me!" is the cry of his inmost soul. Sighing, languishing, and weeping, he sinks into the dust before the steps of the throne of grace, and now we behold him invested with the sacred badge of mendicity of which we spoke! For the consciousness that he is a poor sinner, and that his salvation is to be found alone in the blood of Jesus, is the beggar's badge, which is not to be purchased, or borrowed, or arbitrarily procured, but which, as we have already said, falls from heaven upon earth, which God alone can give, and which he presents to all his elect at the period which he has selected for that purpose.

How despicable is this beggar's badge in the eyes of the world! And yet no sooner is a sinner invested with it, than its influence is felt on every side, both in the visible and invisible worlds, for it causes vexation triumph, joy, and exultation. The world begins to scoff and say, "This or that person has also become a saint," and a variety of expressions of the kind. The devil foams with vexation; for the beggar's badge upon the sinner is to him only too sure a sign that the stronger one has again come upon him, and deprived him of another booty. The children of God run together, and joyfully whisper into each other's ears, "Do you know that such a one has also received the badge, and is become a poor sinner?" and the badge of beggary indicates to them the pleasing circumstance, that a new brother has been born to them, and that the Lord is still active, and that the Spirit still blows, and that

their kingdom still grows and prospers. Even into heaven itself the beggar's badge of the newly awakened sinner extends its influence, and there also it gives the signal for the most lively emotions. "There is joy in heaven in the presence of the angels of God," says the Scripture, "over one sinner that repenteth." For then the devil experiences a discomfiture, at which these holy intelligences triumph. The blood of Christ proves its saving efficacy, and this calls forth their exultations. Their King glorifies his omnipotent heart-changing grace; and this causes them to seize their harps and sing. They salute, in the weeping penitent beneath the cross, a new partaker of their glory; and this increases their joy. They behold fresh tears of gratitude interweave themselves in the crown of their king, as its most lovely ornaments; and this fills them with rapture. And O how many other causes do they find in this single inconsiderable event, to break out into singing and loud hallelujahs! I read nothing in the Bible of there being joy in heaven, when an individual finds a lump of gold, or receives the star of nobility, or is elevated to some brilliant station, or obtains the laurel-wreath of earthly celebrity. But the beggar's badge of which we are speaking, causes joy in every direction—to the angels, the just made perfect, the saints on earth, and consequently to the whole of God's kingdom; and it is only the devil and Belial's gloomy rout that pine at the sight of it. What an excellent testimony to the value of the beggar's badge!

But it is not others alone who regard this badge with joy. He who receives it, also gradually rejoices in it—nay, he even learns to boast of it, however painful he felt it at first to wear it, and to be obliged to inhabit the poor-house. But whither does his mendicity lead him? O not to the houses of strangers, nor to scowling countenances!

It guides him to a threshold, where he has no occasion to fear a painful reception, rude reproach, repulsive language, or the being menaced with the police and the house of correction. There dwells indeed a rich and potent Lord—the richest and most powerful in the world; no man of property, no nobleman, no prince or king is what he is. But kindness reigns in his countenance, and nothing but grace and love are expressed in his deportment. His children come flying out, and take the timid beggar confidentially by the hand, and call the astonished supplicant, their dear brother! and embrace him, as if they had known him ever so long. But what a sun of kindness and compassion rises, when the master of the house himself makes his appearance! He approaches the timid beggar, whilst cordially calling him his son, and begins amidst the most delightful salutations of peace, to load him with gifts and presents, such as the world has not to offer. He casts into the humbled sinner's lap, all that the latter can wish and even more. What a robe he puts upon him! With what shoes does he adorn his feet! What a ring does he place upon his hand, and with what assurances and promises does he crown, arm, and protect him! “My beloved,” says he, “what is mine, is thine. Be careful for nothing. Cast all thy care upon me, I will provide for thee. On me hast thou been cast from the womb. Even to old age will I carry thee, I will help thee and deliver thee. I will keep thee as the apple of mine eye. I will never leave nor forsake thee, nor suffer thee to want any good thing.” And thus he continues, and there is no end to the precious words. The poor sinner stands amazed, and knows not what he ought to say, and is ready to kiss his pauper's badge for introducing him into such a house, and to such a kind and gracious Lord. And do we not kiss it ever

more cordially, my brethren ! and press it ever more joyfully to our hearts ? O what a pleasant and blissful life, to be a beggar at Jesus' door, and to subsist upon his alms, and from his purse ! This alone is riches and real delight. Whether we are believed or not, the mendicity of the children of God is a glorious state.

“Glorious ! How can this be ? since begging is disgraceful.” Yes, so it appears at first to every one who is compelled to assume the beggar's badge ; and hence, no one accepts it willingly ; but afterwards, it is viewed in a different light ; and it is perceived, that not the sceptre nor the crown, but the spiritual badge of pauperism of which we are speaking, is that which translates us into the most brilliant circles and the highest spheres of nobility and human rank. For all the holy men of God and the favourites of Jehovah—and they certainly constitute the highest rank of nobility—also bore this badge, as their most peculiar and distinguishing mark, as their most essential signature and—glory. Abraham was of this fraternity. Moses, David, and Solomon wore the badge. All the prophets and apostles boast of it. The fathers of the church, and the reformers appeared in it, and esteemed it as their glory. How highly therefore ought we to value that which brings us into the same class and fraternity with these illustrious individuals ; and this is nothing else but the pauper's badge. What have I to do with anything else, however imposing it may appear to the world ? Even a villain may wear it ; and at all events, it falls at length into dust and ashes. Not so the beggar's badge. No rogue nor swindler wears it. It indicates that those who are invested with it are priests and kings, are righteous and heirs of eternal life, and accompanies them even into heaven itself,

“Into heaven?” Most assuredly. But there it ceases to be the badge of mendicity; it is there transformed into something else. There it flourishes as a palm of triumph. Our old friend there blooms with a thousand flowers of sweet recollections. It there becomes the insignia of eternal triumph, and is even changed into a sceptre; for the saints of the Most High shall judge the world—according to the Scriptures—and shall reign with Christ for ever and ever. Observe, therefore, how much combines to present us with reason upon reason not to be ashamed of the beggar’s badge, but on the contrary, to rejoice at it, and to boast of it with all our power.

Nor will we cease doing so, as many of us as have received it from God’s gracious hands. Yes, we likewise belong to the order of mendicants—this we frankly assert and are willing to belong to it. But we are not beggars before thy door, miserable world! We request nothing of thee! Retain thy possessions for thyself. Thy despicable trifles cannot satisfy us. We lie before another gate, and our position there is comfortable and delightful, “as having nothing, yet possessing all things;” as those to whom it is said, “Thou art poor, and blind, and miserable, and naked?” but then again, “All things are yours.” Therefore whoever is invested with this badge, must not be ashamed of it, but glory in it openly, and press it to his heart, and regard it as the sign of true nobility, and as affording access to the treasures of the skies. May all of you become members of the order! I have nothing better to wish you. For the Lord will deliver the poor and the needy when he crieth.

III.

What are the directions which Elisha gives to the dignified invalid? He sends him word, saying, “Go and wash

in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." Certainly, this was a piece of advice as strange as it was unexpected, and surprised Naaman to such a degree, as completely to cast him down from all the loftiness of his hopes. But who can mistake the deeply typical nature of the prophet's message? Even with respect to sin, the spiritual leprosy, we can only prescribe a similar thing to that which Elisha ordered for his patient. A bath, a washing, a plunging—though certainly in a different flood to that of an earthly stream. The prophet testifies that, for the house of David, a fountain is open for sin and uncleanness. And such is really the case. Plunge into it, thou guilty criminal, or thou mayest rub the skin from thy hands without eradicating the bloody spot from it. "If I wash thee not," said the Saviour to Simon, "thou hast no part in me." Read the first part of this sentence with a threefold emphasis, and the one thing needful will have fully unveiled itself to thee.

Let the emphasis rest first upon the letter '*I*.' "If *I* wash thee not." He must do it. Wash thyself with whatever, and in what manner thou pleasest—yet if Jesus do not wash thee, thou wilt continue unclean in the sight of God. Wash thee with good works, alms-giving, and devotional exercises. It will prove advantageous to thee. The world will commend thee. But thou must remain destitute of the commendation of the Most High, as long as thou art not washed by Jesus' hands. Let others wash thee by flattering opinions respecting thee, by favourable testimonies, and good reports. This will also be of some profit to thee. But if thou desirest more than the applause of the world, take to heart the words, "If *I* wash thee not, thou hast no part with me."

"If I *wash* thee not." The emphasis lies upon the word

wash, if we read the sentence in another manner. It is not enough that Jesus does some particular thing for thee; he must *wash* thee; for thou art filthy from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot. "But," sayest thou, "he teaches and instructs me." And so a Judas might boast, and yet perish. "But he has heard my prayer, and conferred benefits upon me." This he has done to many, who are now consuming in the hottest hell. "And he preserves me from many ebullitions of sin; he often knocks at my door, and frequently refreshes me with his words." it so. The question here is, "Has he washed thee?" If Be not, whatever else he may have done to thee, woe betide thee! It is the washing alone which proves effectual.

Read a third time, "If I wash *thee* not," and lay the emphasis on the word *thee*. "I know very well that I must be washed," sayest thou. But this knowledge is not sufficient. "I have also directed many to the fountain of the house of David." That may be: but hast thou been thyself in this bath? "This and that individual also received the forgiveness of their sins." We wish them joy upon the occasion. But listen. "If I wash *thee* not," saith the Lord, "thou hast no part with me." Hear it, and awake from thy delusion. O take this saying of the Lord, addressed to Simon, home with thee, as directed also to thee! I really know of nothing more important to inscribe on the tablets of thy memory, than these words in their three-fold reading. *He* must wash—thou must be *washed*—and he must wash *thee*, or else thou wilt remain what thou art, a sinner, and worthy of death.

But wherewith is this washing accomplished. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son," exclaims the apostle, "cleanses us from all sin." The Church triumphant has "washed its robes, and made them white in the blood of

the Lamb." It is said to those who are justified in the sight of God, "ye are come to the blood of sprinkling." He who partakes of the blessing procured by Immanuel's passion, possesses the robe that is washed by blood, and is free and cleansed from his leprosy. There is no more condemnation to him. The sins of his life have received their reward. They are punished, compensated, atoned for, and blotted out of God's remembrance. They are buried as soon as committed—buried before they are committed. And if the blood of the Lamb removes the spots—it also serves for a beauteous dress, and a mark of distinction. He to whom the chastisement which Christ endured is imputed, also receives the benefit of Christ's spotless obedience. Even as justification proceeds from the latter, so sanctification likewise in an equal degree. Live in this blood by faith, and like a miraculous dew, it will cause the virtuous germ of thy new nature to spring up and expand. It will flow like oil into the flame of thy love, and will assist humility in obtaining the victory in thee. It will render thee merciful, and forgiving, and patient. It will embitter to thee the vain delights of the present world, and give thee courage and fortitude in the distresses of life, as well as at death. Yes, in whatever way thou regardest it, it is true what the Scriptures say, that "life is in the blood."

The saints above sing the song of the Lamb, and that with reason. They are exclusively indebted for what they have, are, and enjoy, to his blood. That the Lamb was slain for them is the cause, the only cause of their being in heaven. With it they attained at the same time, their worthiness, as well as their inheritance, in the most easy, comfortable, and gratuitous manner. Their salvation has cost them nothing, except possibly, the lying and

visionary image of a righteousness of their own, which they were compelled of necessity to sacrifice to truth. The entire purchase-money for the glory to which they are exalted, has been paid by another. And this payment was sufficient, once for all. The capital was ample, and required no addition of any kind from any other quarter.

O thou blood of the Lamb of God—thou wondrous and omnipotent blood! if the world count thee as unclean, and tread thee under foot, I will speak thy praise as long as there is breath in me, and esteem thee as my highest and dearest possession! Were should I be, hadst thou not flowed for me? Thy living flood swept away the hateful image of my corrupt nature. Sprinkled with thee, I came forth a new creature, and out of thee sprung up my palm of triumph over hell and the grave. But who can sufficiently praise thee, and the boundlessness of thy power and efficacy? Blood, a drop of which is sufficient instantaneously to render blood-red transgression as white as snow; which in a moment, washes me cleaner than even the angels themselves after a sanctification of a thousand years; which arrays me in an innocence and acceptableness in the sight of God, to which the beauty of Adam in paradise did not extend; which covers my sinful head with crowns of life, and opens out the road to me, even into the presence-chamber of the triune God, which makes room for me to stand with joy before his face, and elevates, capacitates, and gives me a right to an endless repose in his arms, and on his paternal bosom. Praiseworthy and miraculous blood—who can worthily praise thee? Mayest thou never remove from the sight of my spirit, when this world shrouds itself in night and darkness before the closing eye of this mortal frame. O that I might behold thy lustre, blood of the cross! when eternity unfolds itself be-

fore me, and when in its sight, the register of my sins in all their blackness once more presents itself more vividly than ever to my view. O then I shall be strong! Then I shall fear nothing. In beholding thee, I shall overcome all my terrors. Continue therefore ever present to my faith! Redden the threshold of my heart with the brightest radiance! O sacred blood, come upon all of us, for our everlasting atonement and reconciliation! Amen.

XIII.

THE WAY TO BE HEALED.

IN the midst of a barren waste, not far from Bethlehem, a simple stone elevates itself, covered with the moss of age, which silently relates to the listening ear of the traveller, many a mournful as well as consolatory and heart-cheering tale. The patriarch Jacob set it up over the grave of his beloved Rachel, and this simple witness of a highly significant event, stands upon record to this day. Come, let us socially take our seats for a few moments round the stone, and likewise listen to the wondrous voices which whisper from it. They are voices of very profound and glorious truth, bearing upon their wings ideas both of life and death.

It was here, where the stone stands, that Rachel was gathered to her fathers. Almost the whole of believing Israel died "on the road to Bethlehem." In the prospect of the appearing of the great morning-star, they lived, rejoiced, wept tears of joy, nor heeded reproach or the toils of life; but in this prospect their eyes grew dim, and their hearts ceased to beat. They heard the bells of Bethlehem from afar; but were not permitted to behold Bethlehem's glory. Rachel's lot was also the lot of her children. They died on the march to the city of David. Rachel died indeed on the journey; but nevertheless the worthy soul arrived at home. Such is still the case with many. O, if only the pole of our carriage is but directed towards Bethlehem—let the wheels be unable to reach the spot on

this side the grave! Many here below continue to cleave to the Old Testament. As long as they live, they have to do with Moses and their sins. We grieve for these oppressed and short-winded characters. God alone can furnish additional horses in the sandy desert. Whether he provides them, or suffers the pilgrim to continue without consolation on the way to the well of Bethlehem, they reach home in every case. "The name of the Lord," says Solomon, "is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe;" and he likewise who is on the way to it, enjoys the Divine protection.

Rachel died on the way to Bethlehem. She died as a type. Death must always ensue, before we arrive at Bethlehem; or else we come to Bethlehem like any other place, and a Christmas gift is out of the question. But what kind of a death? Rachel must die within thee—the child of man that seeks to become his own mediator—and thou must become a sinner, who art desirous of grace. Erect a tombstone over the ashes of thine own wisdom, righteousness, and strength, and then proceed courageously to Ephratah and its Christmas lights.

But where such a death takes place, God provides a honourable interment. He plunges the old self-righteous man into the silent depth of oblivion. He no longer exists before him. A Peter may speak of a Simon having been buried, and a Paul of a Saul laid in the coffin. And though the old Saul may still stir and move, yet in the sight of God he is interred for ever. No trumpet blast of the archangel will any more awake this corpse.

Rachel died when bringing into the world an infant son. When a man dies spiritually, a joyful and festive peal mingles its notes with the tolling funeral bell. What is the meaning of that? That from the ashes of the old, a

new man is brought to light,—a man with the tear of repentance on his eye-lashes, and the words of David on his lips, “O that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!” Let this man no longer delay, but do as is recorded of Rachel’s infant, with whom his father Jacob proceeded further, and pitched his tent on the other side of the tower of Edar. This man has received a divine invitation to Bethlehem. For him the Sun of Righteousness arose in the gloom of midnight. For him flourished the tree of life, and to him the blissful mystery of the manger and the cross will yield its balm.

Rachel’s son must have a name. What name shall be given to him? His dying mother called him Benoni—the child of sorrow. And such is the name which is sought to be bestowed from many quarters, on the awakened sinner who thirsts after Jesus. The prince of hell, in his rage at the loss he has recently sustained, calls him Benoni. The blind world displeased at his having left her course, baptizes him Benoni. Perhaps even his father and mother denominate him Benoni, because he can no longer sanction their vanities. His own flesh and blood call him Benoni; for the young son crucifies the old Adam, and the latter can no longer act as he formerly did. He receives also the appellation of Benoni, but in a better sense, from individuals, who like Paul with the Galatians, have travailed in birth, and assisted in bringing him forth to newness of life. His heavenly parent, eternal love, may also especially term him Benoni; for how much did she suffer in rescuing him! But let whoever pleases call him Benoni; let him even call himself a child of sorrow, on account of the cross which the Lord Jesus has laid upon his shoulder; his true and real name is different; even as the son of Rachel was called by another name.

The right of giving the child a name belongs solely to the child's father ; and the name which he selects, passes for the true one. Jacob did not let himself be deprived of this right at the birth of his last-born, but protesting against the maternal appellation, he said, " Not Benoni, but Benjamin, shall he be called—this is, the son of my right." And the Lord also says, " Benjamin," protesting against all the titles of lowliness or disgrace, which his children may give themselves, or which others may apply to them. " Let Benjamin be their name," is his paternal ultimatum. This name therefore is the correct one. Let its sound never depart from our ears, and let its blissful signification continue impressed upon our hearts.

2 KINGS v. 11—13.

" But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call upon the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper.

" Are not Abana, and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel ? May I not wash in them and be clean ? So he turned and went away in a rage.

" And his servants came near and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it ? how much rather then, when he saith unto thee, Wash, and be clean ? "

A scene presents itself to our view in these words, which is equally instructive and interesting. It seems as if no veil were suffered to rest upon the heart of Naaman, but the whole of it is displayed to us. But where is there a greater resemblance, with reference to hereditary and fundamental features, than one human heart bears to the

other? Attend; for whilst causing Naaman's interior to pass in review before us, we shall find ourselves, ere we are aware, in our own territories. NAAMAN'S STRANGE DISPLEASURE, and THE BECOMING REPROOF WHICH HE RECEIVED, are the two objects, which at this time claim our attention. The path of our present meditation leads through a fruitful field, which the Lord has blessed.

I.

It is no longer pleasant to be with our hero. The barometer of his features portends a storm. Yes, the lightnings already flash upon his forehead. All is in dreadful uproar within. "This will never do,"—is his murmuring language to himself,—“I have taken this long journey; have spared neither trouble nor expense; I have been sent from one to the other, and in the end what a miserable result! ‘Go, and wash in Jordan seven times.’ What need was there, for the sake of a cold bath, to travel to the remotest corner of this so-called land of wonders! What do the people imagine to themselves? They may be only trifling with me, and making a fool of me!” Such are his angry thoughts in the corner of his chariot, and his arm feels a convulsive motion towards the pommel of his sword. He feels himself most deeply injured, insulted, and mortified; for he believes that he is wilfully deceived, and his fury and thirst for revenge are equally as great as the stinging pain and despair with which he beholds, as he supposes, the final shipwreck of the barque of his pleasing hopes, which had borne him to the very entrance of the wished-for port.

It is a singular spectacle which presents itself to us in this infuriated warrior. An ebullition of wrath, like consuming fire. And for what reason? For none whatever.

A waste of fire ! a despair which cannot be more complete, and that but a step from the attainment of his sweetest hopes ! Happiness lies before his door, and the gate of peace has just been thrown open to him, only that it is done in a rather different manner to what he had imagined ; and for this reason, he is on the point, in his strange delusion, of turning about again with the whole burden of his wretchedness, though close upon the threshold of his salvation and restoration. Against whom is the rage, the reviling, and the desperation which fill his mind, directed ? First of all against the Israelitish maid, whose suggestion, like some *ignus fatuus*, has decoyed him thither ; against king Jehoram, who in his estimation would have done better had he kept to himself the delusive advice which he gave him ; against the towns-people of Jericho, who strengthened him in his vain and delusive hope ; and, finally, against the prophet, who, as it now seemed most evident to him, was not able to do anything. But if instead of reviling this imaginary alliance of conspirators against him, Naaman had reproached his ownself—he would have acted better, and more reasonably ; for if he had followed the dictates of his own passion, the long journey would have been undertaken in vain, he would have returned unhealed to Damascus, have there fallen a prey to his dreadful malady ; and whom would he have had to thank for it ? No one in the world but himself. The rocks are in his own heart, which threaten for ever to destroy his hopes. These dangerous cliffs are his unfounded suppositions, his preconceived opinion, and his human judgment. Help is really at hand. Why does he not lay hold of it ? Simply because it offers itself to him in a different form to that in which he imagined it would have presented itself.

“ Behold, *I thought*,” says he, whilst ordering the horses

to be turned round to depart—"I thought it would have been accomplished in such and such a manner." O baneful and execrable supposition! I know not a more injurious thing on earth than this. It is the devil's chain, the prison-house of hell, the custodium of death, and the mightiest of those bulwarks, which toweringly separate between sinners and their only deliverer. Many a one probably perceives that he is a sinner; but then he begins to imagine and suppose, and thinks that God will take his weakness into account, and not require more from an individual, than he is able to perform. And this supposition becomes a snare to the unhappy mortal, and keeps him at a distance from the throne of grace, and from salvation by Christ. There are doubtless many whose consciences tell them that they need an atonement. But supposition again interposes, and the man thinks that atonement is an affair which he himself must accomplish, by a ceasing to do that for which his conscience reproves him; and this supposition brings death along with it, since it deeply conceals from his view the only place of refuge for poor sinners. Very many, who would gladly behold the God of gods in a closer manner than he is reflected in the obscure mirror of their conceptions, continue to grope in the dark, because their carnal ideas spread a thick veil over God in Christ; as if a self-humiliation of the Eternal to a manifestation in the flesh, were a thing inconceivable. And others, whose life is almost one continued thunder-clap of warnings hasten, nevertheless, in incomprehensible security, towards eternal destruction. Their suppositions betray their insanity. The chain by which the prince of the bottomless pit leads them on, is the dark and goundless idea imbibed with their mother's milk, that nothing evil is in any respect to be feared on the part of a God who is

love itself. O the incredible hardihood of venturing out into an awful futurity, on the deceitful plank of a human opinion! No prudent merchant hazards the whole of his earthly property on a mere supposition that this or that particular speculation may succeed. He must have a degree of certainty with respect to the successful result. To place the salvation of the soul, on the contrary, on the uncertainty of an opinion, is a small thing with the majority of mankind. But this placing that which is the highest and holiest at stake, will fearfully avenge itself. "Thousands," says some one, "who finish their course here below with an 'I suppose,'—will commence their future existence with an 'I supposed all would be well.' I supposed God would make no difficulty in pardoning me. I supposed hell did not exist; that the devil was a creature of the brain; the curse a bugbear; and damnation a scarecrow. I supposed that such was the case; but alas! alas! I find it otherwise. My supposition has dreadfully deceived me."

But what had Naaman supposed would happen? A variety of things, of which he experienced the reverse. "I thought," murmured he, "that the prophet would have come out to me." "A guest such as I," is his meaning—"does not stop every day at his door." He expected a reverential regard to his person and his high rank, and experiences a treatment which places him on a par with the meanest of those who seek for help. This vexes the proud man extremely, and leaves him no longer in doubt that the prophet is unable to do any thing for him. A strange inference this! Strange, certainly, but not of rare occurrence. What happens in the world to the doctrine we preach? Does it meet with better treatment than Elisha did at Jericho? You know that it also knows nothing of

any superiority with respect to station, education, or moral worth, but treats every one, without distinction, as a publican and a sinner, and bids them seek their salvation in *free grace*. But for this very reason, the world also rejects it, and will not allow it to be divine doctrine, exclaiming against it as a confused medley, and as madness. And what did the blind Syrian suppose further? "I thought," continues he, "that he would surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper." There indeed, we have it. Such an idea he had brought with him—not out of the kingdom of truth, but out of that of deceit and darkness. He had imagined to himself an ostentatious piece of parade, a pompous magical scene, similar to those practised in heathen countries. That the commencement would be made with a variety of formalities and strange phenomena; that then the wonder worker would appear arrayed in an unwonted habit and with an awe-inspiring countenance, his gestures mysterious and awful, his steps measured, his movements solemn and enigmatical, many dark sayings and proverbs in his mouth, and in his right hand a staff, a golden censer, or something of the kind; then, after having drawn a magic circle, that he would proceed to conjure invisible beings, call upon the name of God, and that finally there would be a manipulation of the leprous person in a solemn manner, a majestic imposition of hands, a significant stroking of the wounds and ulcers, and a variety of such-like imposing and fantastic ceremonies.

Such was the kind of fanciful image that presented itself to Naaman's soul. In this way he supposed the miraculous deed would be performed. But when nothing of all that he had thus anticipated manifested itself, there

was an end to his belief that any thing divine was to be expected. He regards himself as deceived and circumvented, and gives his last hope to the four winds. Lamentable delusion ! Had he only left his preconceived notions at home, the absence of anything like display in the conduct of Elisha, would have led him to draw inferences of an entirely contrary kind, and have forced upon him the joyful conviction, that this man could not possibly be a cloud without water, but must possess a control over supernatural powers, and be very well assured of the result of his instructions, or else he would not so completely divest himself of all specious and imposing apparatus, nor hazard his entire reputation by such a brief and unequivocal direction as that of telling him to wash himself seven times in Jordan, and he should be clean. But Naaman is taken captive by the opinion he had formed, and measures divine things by a human criterion, having no presentiment that only that which is human, because it is mean and poor in itself, requires specious adornment in order to be esteemed ; whilst that which is divine, because it is great and sublime in itself, would be only troubled and obscured by any addition of outward pomp.

But how many there are who are of Naaman's perverted sentiments ; and because they are so, they partake likewise of his fate, but only in a grievous manner. Their unhappy opinions, which have originated in flesh and blood, are like the veil of Moses to their eyes ; and clothe the kingdom of truth, as it respects them, in impenetrable obscurity. With regard to them there is no word of God in existence, because they have formed to themselves a totally different idea how the Lord would speak, in case he opened his mouth, than they find realized in the style and tone of the Holy Scriptures. They know equally as little of the

mighty acts of the Most High amongst the children of men; because nothing of all that which claims to be regarded as such, approaches the pompous or scanty ideas, which they think themselves constrained to form of the entrance of the Almighty into the material world. They are likewise unacquainted with any Divine institutions upon earth for the salvation of sinners; because those which really exist, do not correspond with the imaginary ideas, which in their beclouded minds, they arbitrarily form of the Divine procedure. Thus their thinking, imagining, and supposing, causes them the loss of every thing that is truly great, Divine, and beautifying in the world; whilst, on the other hand, it misleads them to the deification of things, which as it regards their intrinsic value, are as worthless and empty, as they outwardly appear specious and imposing.

Hence, whoever desires to enter the sanctuary of truth, let him first of all offer up his preconceived opinions at its threshold. It is not to the form in which that which is Divine appeared, that the unbelief of the world is owing; but the preconceived improper opinion, how *it ought* to have appeared, is the parent and vehicle of unbelief. The mighty pillars by which the dominion of the prince of darkness upon earth is supported, rest on the opinions and suppositions of mankind. By means of the vain ideas of mortals, the devil rules the world; and it is only where these vain ideas are dispelled, and the individual begins to mistrust the infallibility of his natural understanding, that hell trembles. And when once the conviction urges itself upon the mind, that the manner in which that which is divine manifests itself, can only be learnt experimentally from that which is divine itself—the man is then certainly not far from the kingdom of God. For it is inherited by

the childlike mind, which does not seek to know, until it is instructed ; that childlikeness, which says, " Let me first behold the sun, and then tell you *how* it shines and glitters." All the world would regard him as a fool, who would begin to draw a map of a country before he had investigated it, especially if he were afterwards to travel through it, and maintain that this could not possibly be the country, because it did not correspond with his map. But thousands, as it respects matters of faith, incur the same charge of folly, and deny, in the face of the truth, that it is the truth, because—O egregious error!—the characteristic marks of this daughter of the skies were established, before they themselves knew her, or had seen her features.

II.

However, that which gave such great offence to the leprous Syrian, was not only the unexpected manner of Elisha's, behaviour towards him, but still more so the trifling nature of the remedy which the prophet prescribed to him. " Go," said the latter, " and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean!" " What—in Jordan?" exclaimed the enraged warrior, " Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean?" Certainly, regarding the matter from the point of view which he took, he was in the right respecting the rivers he mentions. Even to the present day, the Syrian waters are regarded as more salubrious and invigorating than most of those of the promised land. But who told this stranger to compare the Jordan with the streams near Damascus, as it respects their chemical nature? What should we say, if a person were to remark, that the water in some particular watering-place

was more beneficial than that with which we performed the ordinance of baptism; or, that in such and such a place, superior and more nourishing bread was baked than we were wont to use at the communion? Could we feel sufficiently surprised at the absurdity and grossness of such opinions?

The judgment of our warrior falls under the same category. He does not reflect that a Divine word of promise is now attached to the waters of Jordan, with reference to him. The assurance is given him, in the name of the Almighty that he shall be healed by this water of his leprosy; consequently, no other stream can compare with this river in the power to heal. Yes, if the Lord connects a word of promise with it, even a cottage is better than a royal palace; a baked barley loaf more savoury than the most splendid feast; a staff in the hand of Moses more powerful than the sceptre of a prince; ay, and even a deficiency is of more value than the largest capital and abundance. What were all the medicaments in the world compared with the brazen serpent in the wilderness, after the Lord had said, "Whosoever looketh upon it, the same shall be healed?" What were many tons of oil compared with the poor cruse at Zarephath, after the benediction of the prophet had been pronounced upon it? The value of a thing is chiefly decided by the circumstance, whether a promise of Jehovah is attached to it or not. The scanty tables, empty cellars, and hard couches of the poorest amongst the children of God, must be estimated at a higher price than the full larders, silken sofas, and groaning tables of those who have no part in the promise, "The Lord careth for you. Ye shall be fed and clothed, and shall not want any good thing."

Naaman judged according to appearances, and not ac-

according to faith. He looked at the waters of Jordan simply as such, without reflecting that they were something more for him, after the Bethesda angel of the divine benediction had descended into them. The bathing in Jordan seemed also to him a much too simple operation for him to promise himself any effectual result from it. If Elisha had proposed to him some more uncommon, circumstantial, and difficult task, Naaman's heart would have been the sooner accessible to hope. From this quarter also the instructions of the prophet ran directly contrary to the opinion of an invalid; their simplicity completed his despair. "There is now no prospect left me," thinks he, "but a dreadful death! I perceive that all conspire against me. In alliance with an unmerciful destiny, they seek to complete my misery by cruel deception."

Such are his thoughts, and in a rough tone, he orders the horses to be turned round, and to drive off without delay. He is obeyed. The chariots drive round, the attendants take their places, the domestics ascend their camels, and the cavalcade moves forwards. But what are our feelings at this moment? Are they not as though we ought forcibly to seize the horses by their bridles, and close every barrier against the deluded stranger? Really it is enough to draw tears, to see the pitiable man at the open gate of his Zoar and his Bethel, with his whole wretchedness and misery, and yet about to return home again. And doubtless he would have returned as he came: no power in the world would have softened his obstinacy or shaken his purpose, if God himself had not mercifully interposed, and, with the hand of omnipotence, taken the bandage of deceit and delusion from his eyes. But the great Author and Finisher of faith is ready to do this also. He manifests the same faithfulness towards all whom he

intends to heal of the leprosy of sin. And how needful it is that he does manifest it! For supposing that the consciousness of guilt, together with the longing after reconciliation were already produced in thee, and he did not conduct thee further—really thou wouldst still go astray, even in sight of the manger and the cross, and miserably perish in the darkness of some self-selected path.

Naaman requires being disenchanted, humbled, and re-proved. Now observe how minutely the Lord's procedure is directed to this threefold object. Before he takes the invalid in hand, he suffers the whole fury of his passion to discharge itself, that even as the Syrian is bodily unclean, he may also become morally so in his own eyes. In addition to this, he does not prevent him from really commencing his return; but acts on the contrary, as though he did not trouble himself about the heathen. This reserve of Jehovah naturally tended only to inflame the man's fury still more: but there was something abasing, humiliating, and deeply confounding for him in the circumstance, which was not exactly softened by the fact that God, as the instrument of his further procedure, did not employ the prophet, nor one of our hero's adjutants, but ordered Naaman's coachman and baggage-servants to reprove their master, like Balaam's ass its rider.

The cavalcade has already proceeded some distance on the way. Elisha continues in his chamber, sighing for eyesalve for the infatuated heathen, when all at once the servants, who regarded the matter with more simple eyes, surround their master's chariot, and begin as reverentially, as fervently and urgently, to conjure him to follow the injunction of the prophet, and to try at least the proposed remedy. "My father," say they, in a cordial and confidential manner. It might therefore be inferred from their

mode of address, that Naaman, in his domestic circle, was a kind and benevolent master ; and such is the case also with many a one in his customary manner of life, until something similar is enjoined upon him to the washing in Jordan, in order to be made clean. How soon may a lamb then become an adder ! But if the result prove more favourable, you may safely believe that grace has had its hand in the affair. To the heart which is under Divine influence alone, is the preaching of the blood of sprinkling no stumbling-block nor foolishness. Where this influence is wanting, the most affectionate mode of address will produce as little effect as the most alarming admonitions to repent and flee from the wrath to come. The man will show thee his teeth, but not a tearful eye.

But hear how the servants support their entreaties. Remarkable are the words which proceed out of their mouths. We are almost tempted not to believe our own ears. " My father," say they, " if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it ? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean ? " Tell me, from whence is it that these camel-drivers derive such wisdom ? To what school are they indebted for such profound intellectual knowledge ? Who enabled them to cast such a deep and penetrating look into the human heart, and to unveil to us, in such brief and suitable language, one of its most delicate and latent features ? O certainly, they are in the right ! If Elisha had made some great exploit the condition of the cure—a pilgrimage through the Arabian desert—the ascending of some lofty mountain on his knees—a fasting of several days together—a costly sacrifice, or something of that nature—Naaman would have cherished good hopes, and have assented to it without delay. But a washing in Jordan

seems to him something much too trifling, to induce him to resign himself to the idea that the God of Israel would combine a miraculous cure with such an inconsiderable act.

How deeply do the self-righteous ideas of vassalage and reward penetrate even to the very marrow of man, and how little capable as well as inclined he is to believe in free grace! He rejects with disdain the gospel of peace, because instead of imposing labour upon him, it is willing to enrich him gratuitously, and, as it were, whilst asleep. He wishes to do something first, and then let himself be comforted. The proud and beggarly fool! who if salvation depended upon the perfect fulfilment of a single iota of the law, must necessarily remain a debtor to it to all eternity. He is dead in sins. Even under the most favourable circumstances, he can only pay in false coin. Yet still he refuses to let anything be given him, and is even bitterly enraged, as often as forgiveness of sins, the outflowing of unconditional compassion, and the righteousness of Christ is commended to him as the robe in which he ought to envelop himself in prospect of the judgment-day. "I desire not the attire of another," is the language of his arrogant and self-righteous heart. "I esteem Jesus as an example," says he, "but leave Jesus as a Saviour to others. Striving gains the crown, and not an idle resting on the grace of God." How often do we hear such language! It is innate in human nature, which as a born enemy to the Gospel, may certainly boast of seeing in the present day the fallaciousness of her gloomy ideas formed into a system under the well known name of Rationalism, and elevated to be the universal confession of the world.

How difficult is it occasionally even for us to be perfectly reconciled to the Gospel, although the scales of self-deception may have fallen from our eyes, and the heart,

oppressed by the burden of sin, have decidedly cast anchor upon Jesus ! We feel really uneasy at the liberality of the New Testament economy. The easy path to the blessings of the Divine covenant, becomes wearisome to us by its easiness. Even though we possess nothing, yet we should be very willing to pay something for it. To receive every thing gratuitously, seems despicable to our proud nature, and hazardous and critical to its perverted feeling. We are willing to hope that we shall at length depart in peace, but not already to boast of possessing the right of citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. "More repentance," is the watchword, "more previous sanctification, more love, and then rely upon Christ, and call what is his our own !" What a perversion of the peculiar character of that kingdom, which is based on the mediatorship of the Son ; in which God, after his justice has been satisfied by the obedience of the Surety, seeks solely to magnify his grace. But grace makes no conditions. Grace seeks sinners, not such as are righteous and pious.

There are two paths, from the termination of which the crown of life beams towards thee. Over the portal of the first thou readest the inscription, "Do this, and thou shalt live." Over the other is written, "Come and buy without money." The one is the path of works, the other of faith. But both the one and the other are in themselves pure and unmingled. Choose therefore ! On which of these two paths wilt thou proceed ? The first of them is the way of honour. In it thou wilt be the author of thine own happiness ; wilt meet, by thine own means, the costs of thy salvation ; and wilt receive at the end of thy career, the rewarding palm, not from the hands of mercy, but of justice. But before thou enterest upon this road which promises to be so honorable, know that not indulgence, but

severity rules upon it; that perfect holiness is the price which will be demanded of thee, aye, and that the most faithful labour to escape the curse will not protect thee from it, if at the close of the way thou art indebted to the law a single farthing; and that forgiveness is an idea for which no room is left upon this road. Upon the path of faith, the flesh is not spared. It is a path of humiliation, a path of abasement. It is entered upon, proceeded in, and terminated, with the beggar's badge. Here the crown is not offered as the price of worthiness, but as the bestowment of free grace. On this road there is no longer any thing to pay, but only to enjoy. Another has run, and striven, and conquered for thee. Here, the slightest desire to co-operate actively in the acquirement of the prize held out to us, is considered as a depriving the Son of his honor. But he who accommodates himself to gratuitous reception, finds every thing ready for him here—Mary's good part, without Martha's trouble. Choose therefore! On the first of these two roads, thou wilt taste the delights of a manly self-consciousness at the commencement; the vexation of a lamentable want of success as thou advancest; and the wretchedness of a horrible bankruptcy at the end. On the other, thou wilt experience in the beginning, the pain of a complete impoverishment, according to the Spirit; in the prosecution of the path, the joy of a blissful restoration from the dust in Christ; and at the close, the rapture of an eternal and unspeakable elevation. Upon the first, thou wilt think thyself free, and wilt be nevertheless a tributary servant; thou wilt labour nobly, and yet bring forth fruit only unto death—serving the law and reaping only its curse. Upon the other, an imaginary glory will abandon thee; but thou wilt obtain true glory in its stead; thou wilt depart from thyself, but wilt enter into God; thou wilt re-

nounce a self-acquired stately pauperism, and wilt receive the decorations, blessings, and privileges of a king's son. On the first thou wilt spend thy money for that which is not bread, and thy labour for that which satisfieth not, and the clothes at which thou art working, are only spiders' webs. On the other, thou art Jehovah's honourable guest, and wilt continue to be so ; thou wilt fare sumptuously every day at his expense, and wilt glitter in the festive attire of thy elder brother. On the first, the officer of justice will accompany thee with the scourge, the creditor with his bill will visit thee, the executioner with his sword will await thee. On the other, thy heart alone will impel thee to holiness, nothing will visit thee but God's love and God's blessing, and nothing await thee but the open gate into the eternal city of God.

Come hither, therefore, whoso loveth his own soul. Bid farewell to all ideas of a covenant of works. 'Thou wilt not receive salvation from thy own doings. It must not be taken out of the hands of grace. But grace does not deal and bargain. It bestows, and upbraids no one. It is only pleased with the tears of gratitude. The sweat of a reward-seeking labour is expended for nothing.

XIV.

THE CURE.

You are acquainted with the words which are recorded in Mark ii. 17. You know also who uttered them, and where they were spoken. The Lord is sitting at table with a publican, whose character is none of the best, and is surrounded by a number of individuals of a similar description. Consuming fire, however, does not proceed forth from the Holy One of Israel against these thorns and briars; on the contrary, it is only the lustre of his loving-kindness and benignity which he manifests to these sinners. That this occasions no small offence to the fraternity of pious Pharisees, may be easily supposed. These men of the law are almost excusable, if they lose all their faith in him, and in their displeasure call him a companion of publicans and sinners. Were he to manifest at least but a certain reserve, and magnanimously vouchsafe forgiveness only to those sinners who had given proofs of a real amendment, the thing would be perhaps tolerable. But that he confidentially mixes in their society before they have even manifested contrition, and given vent to noble resolutions, is a mode of procedure which stands in diametrical opposition to all the principles of a rational method of salvation. There the pious gentlemen stand, before the open window of the diningroom, and shake their heads in displeasure, and cannot avoid putting the sarcastic question to his disciples, "How is it that your Master eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?" When Jesus hears this, he casts a significant look on these sneering legalists, and says to them with equal mildness and firmness, from the

midst of the company of sinners, "They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick." And that they might have no doubt respecting the meaning of this figurative language, he adds in explanation, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Precious words! admirable inscription over the gate of God's kingdom! But what do they imply? Who are the righteous? Are they the self-righteous? Impossible! If Jesus did not come to call the self-righteous to repentance, he calls no one to repentance; for we are all self-righteous from our very birth; and sinners, who are already conscious of their wretched state, need not first to be called to repentance. The latter is already produced in their hearts. It is therefore beyond a doubt, that the subject must be apprehended in another manner. The "righteous," in the words we have quoted, are those who have satisfied the demands of the Divine law, and are actually righteous. By "sinners," we have, on the contrary, to understand those who, as debtors to the law, have fallen under the curse. "But," say you, "righteous persons, of the description you mention, are not to be found upon earth." You are in the right, my friends; nor does Jesus think, in these words, of asserting the contrary. "But if such characters do not exist, why the superfluous assurance, that he came not on their account?" The matter, my friends, is as follows. The Lord intends to say to the Pharisees, "You are astonished at my conduct; and you would have had reason for being so, if I were come to seek out and reward virtue. But I came not for the sake of the righteous. My object is, fallen sinners. If you are those who can satisfy the law, you will be saved by your deeds. I let you alone, as people who do not require a Mediator. But why do such fortunate people as you are, seek in your state of spiritual health, to hinder me from hastening with

merciful aid to the poor sick souls, who cannot appeal, like you, to their own virtue? Suffer them therefore, also, to escape from death!"

Such is the meaning which the Lord is desirous of conveying to the irritated scribes; and you, doubtless, feel the powerful sting which accompanies the words. With this simple declaration, he more than gained the victory over these fastidious judges. The dignified composure which he opposed to their displeasure, struck them with admiration, and rendered them ashamed. The intimation, that if they were righteous, he would have nothing to do with them, closed their mouths, and awakened their consciences. In our Lord's mode of behaviour, in the present instance, the most appropriate method of procedure against those who scoff at the Gospel is afforded us. We cannot do better than likewise to say to them, "If ye are righteous as regards the law, we shall be far from troubling you with a call to repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. But here are people of a different kind, who, if you interrogate them, will freely confess that they do not join with you in boasting of their virtues, nor are able to do without grace and a Mediator. Why, therefore, we beseech you, will you be so cruel as not to suffer them to hear the glad tidings, without which they would fall a prey to despair and perdition?" Thus we address you, who are their enemies; and what reply will you make us? Must you not be silent with embarrassment and confusion?

Jesus, therefore, came into the world for the benefit of sinners. Hence it is by no means the worst lot that can befall us, to belong to this fraternity. If any one is holy, he is also in a state of salvation; but the Saviour would not concern him, and his tears of gratitude would not eventually glitter as pearls in Jesus' regal diadem. He would be no member of Him who is the mighty head; to

him the eternal High Priest would be no intercessor, nor would he be arrayed in the costly robe of the Prince of Life himself. A sinner, who had obtained mercy, would always have a mighty preference to such a saint. Ay, and in the light of the precious and faithful words of which we are speaking, the confession that we are sinners is no longer a subject of apprehension, but of consolation. If thou art a sinner, Jesus is well adapted for thee, and thou art well suited for him.

But we hasten to prevent any possible misunderstanding; for many of you seem only too much inclined to misunderstand and even to pervert our words. It remains an eternal truth, that not the righteous, but sinners are permitted to boast, that the Son came into the world for their sakes; but it continues no less incontestably sure, that the Son came not to leave them in their sins, but to create them anew, that they might dedicate themselves to God. If he is the Shepherd who seeks them that are lost, he seeks them in order to bring them back to the path of life. If he is the Saviour who interests himself for sinners, he does so in order to call them to repentance, and render them inimical to sin. If he is the physician who is in search of patients, for what other reason is he in search of them, but in order to heal them? Forgiving grace is always at the same time regenerating grace. I rejoice to be able to prove this truth to you on the present occasion also, from that part of the history of Naaman the Syrian, which we shall now proceed to consider.

2 KINGS v. 14, 15.

“Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh came again, like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

“And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company.”

Thus it is, that all things must work together for good. Naaman's object is attained. God be thanked for it! A pressure is also removed by it from our hearts. Or could we have borne it, had the sick man returned unhealed, notwithstanding the offered aid? Impossible. This would have been much too lamentable; and yet it was on the point of occurring. Thus grossly can the man stand in his own light, when presuming to penetrate into Divine things with his blinded reason, instead of bending to them with resigned simplicity; and when he seeks arbitrarily to determine from that which is within him, the marks by which that which is Divine may be recognised, instead of first becoming conscious of them from that which is Divine itself. Naaman's cure is the subject of our present meditation. We see how the Syrian was delivered, first, **FROM HIS FOLLY**, and then from **HIS DISTRESS AND HIS MALADY**.

I.

You will recollect to what a lamentable height our hero's passion had excited him. Elisha's strange instructions had caused the blood to boil in his veins. He was almost beside himself with indignation. "Forwards," cries he, "forwards!" and wishes to make all haste back again to Damascus, in order, if it must be so, to die there, but also to declare, when dying, that all the art and wisdom of the world is nothing but deception, and that even Israel's celebrated excellency is only a glittering bubble, the miracles of its prophets a mere cheat, and its "Omnipotent Jehovah" an ideal nonentity, a phantom of the brain, and nothing else. Thus the narrative, which had been introduced in such a significant manner, apparently inclines to a highly lamentable conclusion; when suddenly He inter-

poses, whose "calling is without repentance," and who, when once he has laid the foundation, never lays aside his work, until the building is roofed and turretted. You know what occurred. God puts a drag on the chariot wheels of the fleeing hero. But it is not Elisha who appears. Elisha thinks, "Let the fish writhe about as much as it pleases; it is caught in the net;" and remains without anxiety in his cottage. Naaman's servants must this time act as the instruments of Deity; and you have already heard in what manner this was done. The words with which they assail their master deserve an abiding place in our recollection. "My father," is their supplicating language, "if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?"

Naaman had no sooner heard these artless words, than the scales fall from his eyes, and the gloomy ebullition of his rage disappears. They flash through his soul like a ray of heavenly light; they are the beams of the Spirit. "Yes," thinks he, rubbing his forehead, "You speak the truth." I should have been satisfied, had something more difficult been prescribed me; why ought I not to attempt at least that which is easy? May not the God of Israel be desirous of glorifying himself so much the more, by connecting the cure with a means which, with respect to its nature, gives reason to hope for anything else than a beneficial effect, and will therefore serve as a foil to set off in a manner so much the more striking, the might and power of this Deity, as well as his liberality and his grace." Such are his reflections. The words of his servants effected wonders. The world of his hopes, which had disappeared from his view, now rises renewed, as if by magic, from its ashes. The direction given by the little Israeli-

tish maid, which he had begun to regard as an *ignis fatuus*, shines again with the brilliance of a consolatory star. The singular prophet now appears in a very different and more advantageous light, and the idea that Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, were better than the waters of Jordan, withers down to the root. The hurricane in Naaman's bosom is appeased; a tranquil and expectant cheerfulness returns to his soul. He again causes his horses and chariots to turn about, and calls out, "To Jordan! To Jordan!" Thus the result of the matter is a yielding to Elisha's instructions. An earlier decision might have exempted the foolish stranger from much distress and anxiety. However, the interlude of his rage and despondency did him no injury. It might even in the sequel do him similar service to the clay, which restored sight when applied to the eyes of the man born blind, of whom we read in the Gospel. For if after all his sinful murmuring, rage, and invective, he was restored, he had no need of being first taught that he had to thank a God of grace for his cure. His heart and conscience announced it to him sufficiently loudly, and the bending of the knee, and the blush of confusion, came of themselves.

We heartily rejoice at the removal of the cataract from Naaman's eye. The Lord himself performed the operation. The camel-drivers were only the instruments and lancets. It is a great thing when an individual is heartily willing to accommodate himself to the Divine arrangements for his salvation. But no one attains to this state of submission without Divine influence. It presupposes a self-denial, which is the consequence of a regeneration of our whole being. Our inherited reason would eternally regard this Divine arrangement as foolish; our natural conscience consider it only as something superfluous; and our per-

verted feelings are displeasing, dishonourable, and insufficient. We require a new intellectual organization, in order that it may be duly acknowledged on our parts. Therefore when thou seest an individual choosing the Gospel way of salvation, pause thoughtfully before such a phenomenon. In him thou seest more than the unimposing exterior gives reason to expect. Thou art standing before a mighty miracle. A work of creation, similar to that in the beginning, has been accomplished. To human nature another, a Divine nature, has been superadded, and eyes, ears, taste, reason, and heart, are all become new.

The cavalcade reaches the river Jordan. Naaman alights, and approaches the stream, you may suppose with what sensations. The most important moment of his life has now arrived. His last hopes are rocked on the waves of this stream. Are they floating upon their grave, or does the wished-for fulfilment emerge for them out of these depths? Life or death, and even greater things with respect to Naaman, are about to be decided. We indeed are already acquainted with the result. A few minutes more, and the leprous heathen in soul and body exists no longer. The floods of Jordan have swallowed him up, and a new creature, both outwardly and inwardly, stands in his place.

But if we wish fully to understand Naaman's cure, we shall do well previously to call to mind the mysterious nature of the leprosy in Israel. You know that this horrible disease was, according to the Divine intention, an image of sin, and in reality it would be fruitless to look around for a more significant and striking type of it. Taking its rise deeply below the skin, this direful malady shadowed forth the radical corruption and death of sin, in which we are conceived and born. Communicable by the breath and the touch, it shadowed forth the pestiferous in-

fluence which, emanating from us, extends itself even to our dearest associates, notwithstanding the utmost morality of our lives, since we strengthen them, by our example at least, in the soul-slaying idea, that conversion to Christ is not essentially necessary. Manifesting itself outwardly in disgusting swellings and ulcerating boils, that disease portrays to us, at the same time, the real sins which result from hereditary corruption, even as these abominations, in the sight of God, present themselves daily to view, under a thousand forms, in our hearts and lives. Incurable as the malady was, unless God healed it, it also reflects the truth, that redemption from sin and its baneful consequences is a matter which assuredly does not lie within the jurisdiction of human ability. He that was seized with the leprosy, was excluded from the camp, the citizenship of Israel. This means in its antitype, "Thou are not a God that hast pleasure in iniquity, neither shall the wicked stand in thy sight." Such a one was not permitted to approach the sanctuary, even at a distance; the interpretation of which was, "Depart from me, ye cursed! what have I to do with you!" If, however, the disease rose to such a height that the leprosy covered the whole man from head to foot, then, singularly enough, the priest pronounced the leper clean and whole. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." As long, on the contrary, as there was a single spot on the body, healthy and clean—pronouncing the individual clean was out of the question. And thus, as long as a man does not become entirely sinful in his own esteem, but still thinks he finds much that is good in him, he must not expect to hear those words from the lips of the eternal High Priest, "Go thy way, thy sins are forgiven thee!" But if the individual was full of leprosy, he was ordered to show himself to the

priest. Nor are we enjoined to do more, when compelled to exclaim, "My transgressions go over my head, and my sins are too heavy to be borne." The priest then took two birds; the one he slew, the other he dipped in the blood of the former, and let it fly. The latter pointed out the expiated individual, who, for the sake of the death of another, is set at liberty in the most comprehensive sense of the word. The leper was then sprinkled with the blood of a slain lamb, by means of a bunch of hyssop. The meaning of this usage did not escape David, who declaring himself also to be a spiritual leper, supplicatingly exclaims, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity." The blood was sprinkled on the ear, the hand, and the feet. This meant, in reference to the leprosy of the spirit, "Thine ear has not duly listened; thy hand is full of iniquity; thy feet are walking the road to death." The same members were then anointed with oil—an act which pointed out the anointing of the pardoned sinner with the Holy Spirit, to new obedience, life, and conduct. After these ceremonies, the patient was again received into the camp, and carried a priestly attestation about with him, that he was clean, wholly and perfectly clean. And, although the scales of leprosy might not have entirely departed from him, yet no one ventured to regard him in future as unclean, whom the priest had pronounced to be clean. The shell of this latter trait is sufficiently transparent and delicate to display to you the kernel of its consolatory meaning without my interpretation.

The observance of the ceremonies which accompanied this method of healing, were not indeed imposed upon Naaman. Being a heathen, he was not so unconditionally subjected to the ordinances of Israel; and the Lord was already at liberty to make or grant an exception to his Leviti-

cal regulations as often as he pleased. But in the cure of the Syrian those holy usages appear, if I may so speak, transmuted into New Testament ones. A baptism with water is to become to him the means both of a bodily and spiritual regeneration. This sign was, on the one hand, more symbolically intelligible to the heathen than the Levitical ceremonies; and, on the other, it conducted his soul more surely and directly to the Lord, since it gave him much less room for confounding the Divine act with a heathenish magical operation.

II.

You may imagine to yourselves how the heart of our invalid must have beat, when, separating himself from his attendants, he descended alone the rocky strand of the stream, and then set his foot in the surging waves. It was a decisive and important moment. It was now to become evident, whether Jehovah was God, or not; whether Elisha was his prophet, or an imposter; whether Israel was deserving of the name of a Holy Land, or only called itself so in self-conceited presumption; and whether the stranger would have to carry back with him into the heathen world, a song of praise to the honour of Jehovah, or the report, that he was a mere nominal deity. Not an individual of those who composed his retinue but powerfully felt the importance of the approaching moment. Profound and expecting silence reigns along the shore. The warrior stands in the midst of the stream and begins to immerse himself. He dips and dips again, but without any effect, the leprosy has not departed. He immerses himself a third time, but with the same result. However, this does not stagger him. "Seven times," said the prophet. It has already been done six times. Now for the final immersion, to which the promise is attached. How does the

invalid now feel ! How does his heart beat with double rapidity ! How is his mind agitated by the extremes of hope and fear ! It is difficult for him to plunge himself the seventh time under the flood ; for we gladly delay the last attempt until it comes to extremities, because it is the last ; after which, if it remain fruitless, nothing but despair awaits us. “ It is the seventh time,” thinks Naaman ; “ if the water now produces no effect, alas ! alas ! my lot is decided, my hopes are slain, my fate is certain. However,” says he further to himself, “ I cannot stop here ; and the prophet said, ‘ Dip seven times ! ’ Now then, once more, in the name of God and the prophet ! ” Thus saying, he immerses himself. A murmur of anxiety arises amongst the spectators on the shore. “ It will now be seen,” whispers one to the other ; “ this will decide.” Naaman holds his breath. He wishes to remain as long under the water as possible. O what anxious sighs may have escaped him whilst beneath the flood ! How he probably wrestled with God, and energetically clung to him ! “ Jehovah, help ! God of Israel, if thou art a living God, manifest that thou art so. Heal the poor Pagan ! Heal him, Jehovah, of thy mercy and thy grace ! ” Such are the cries of his soul. And now what occurs ? Naaman feels, even beneath the water, that a change is taking place in him, an amazing change. Wondrous strength pours itself through his limbs. A new vital stream penetrates every member. He experiences the joy of health, and more than that. With the thrill of the most joyful excitement and expectation, he again rises out of the flood, and whilst doing so, thunders of exultation salute his ears from the strand ; for he is really healed ! O unheard-of event ! Who ever witnessed such a miracle ! Not a diseased spot is any longer visible upon him. His countenance glistens like one in the glow

of youth. His eyes sparkle like brilliant stars, and not only is the whole ulcerous and scaly coat of the disease left behind in the flood, but even the wasted flesh is renewed. His body is completely renovated, healthy, replete with juices, like that of a young boy, and pure and dazzling, almost like alabaster, from head to foot. O what an exhilarating and sublime moment! One feeling pervades every heart—"How awful is this place!" One impression on their astonished minds:—"Here is more than Baal and his priests!" One confession and acknowledgment from all of them—"The Lord he is God! Glory be to the God of Israel!" The scene on Mount Carmel is renewed, only in the lustre of evangelical transfiguration.

Regard now the waters of Jordan as the emblem of the blood of Christ, and you here behold an event which must be repeated in every one of you. Immerse yourselves in this healing and wondrous stream; or else you will die and perish in your sins. In this blood you see the last means of your purification, the only and more than sufficient means. Why do you run hither and thither, at your own bidding? Why do you heap up vows, one upon another, which you cannot perform? Why do you torment yourselves with devotional exercises which are only glittering rags? If you wish obediently to commend yourselves to God, inquire, first of all, what God enjoins upon you. Your suppositions have no foundation. A washing of your outer garments by efforts of your own is not imposed upon you. God desires to see you washed in the blood of his Son. You must either bow to this arrangement, or he will rebuke you as rebellious, notwithstanding all the earnestness you may display in your sanctification. Do not brag however of your obedience. *We* are obedient, who, for the sake of God and his word, entirely

abstain from seeking to help ourselves by methods of our own choosing ; who no longer move a finger for the purpose of propitiating God ; who, leprous in our own eyes, judge ourselves, pronounce sentence upon ourselves, despair of ourselves, and in this poverty of spirit, humble ourselves under the word, which commends Christ to us as our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption ; *we*, who perceive the whole foundation of our hopes laid not in us, but in another, and firmly trust that we want no other merit than that of our Surety ; who sincerely and actually regard ourselves as judged and dead with Christ, as risen and justified with Christ, ay, and as elevated above all heavens with him, and that we are pure and blameless before God, and rest in this consciousness of our salvation having been already accomplished, delight ourselves in it, renew it daily and hourly within us, and by it overthrow every rising accusation, and every shadow of fear and doubt ; we, who are often reviled for taking it so easy, as being idlers and quietists ; as if the sun were deserving of reproach for giving light and warmth without trouble ; as if the lily were less beautiful because it lets God clothe it ; and as if a man in health were to be blamed because he does not breathe and perform his word like a consumptive person—we, I say, that is, as many of us as belong to Christ's happy people, are the obedient and faithful subjects of God and the observers of his ordinances. For we bow to the words, " Without me ye can do nothing ! " — " By his one offering, he has perfected for ever them that are sanctified. " — " There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus ! " " He bore our sins in his own body upon the tree, and hath blotted out the hand-writing that was against us. " — " Ye are clean, and need not save to wash your feet. " — " With the heart

man believeth unto righteousness.”—“ God hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” We submit ourselves to the Gospel of the ever-blessed God. We are therefore the tractable and obedient, and whilst denying every thing of our own, whether it be reason, or self-opinion, or self-righteous efforts, give due honour to the Almighty God, his will, and his institutions, and esteem his foolishness as infinitely wiser than the wisdom of all created intelligences. Yes, we who are accustomed to regard the smallest doubt of the sufficiency of Christ’s blood for our purification, and the slightest desire to enlarge the merits of our Surety in any manner by our own doings, or the seeking to render ourselves more pleasing to God than Christ has already rendered us, as a spark of infernal rebellion, and as an uproarious movement against the God of gods ;—and judge whether we are not in the right in so doing ? If the Bible be the Word of God—as it really is—we are called upon to submit ourselves to all that it contains. But it tells us, to immerse ourselves in the blood of Christ, and to plunge ourselves into it with every fibre of our hope, and then we shall be saved. If you refuse to do this, you may wear yourselves out in your own efforts to fulfil the tables of the law. No one will reward you for it, not even Moses. He will condemn you in spite of your toil, and send you to the bottomless pit, as those whose ears are uncircumcised.

Naaman is intoxicated with joy at the miraculous cure he has experienced. Though he promised himself much on setting out from Damascus, yet such a restoration as this scarcely once occurred to him. How does he now congratulate himself upon having renounced his own opinion at the proper time, and on having humbled himself, although not without a painful struggle, under Elisha’s ap-

parently absurd directions ! Were he now to stand in the midst of us, how stirringly would he be able to address the doubting and the timid amongst us !” “My friends,” he would say, “trust in Jehovah’s words. They are as a rock. Do not judge of his counsels according to human ideas. Obey them, and judge after the result. O practise what he tells you in simplicity, and do not speculate upon it ! Why do you wish to weary yourselves ? Does it seem to you too simple ? For what purpose your many inventions ? Does it appear hazardous to you ? The responsibility certainly attaches to him. If he shows you a way to be rich without labour, to be crowned without conflict, and to become righteous as in a dream, be satisfied with the pleasing path. It is not the gasping for breath, which will avail you.” Something of this kind is what he would say, and in this manner he would seriously reprove, and even rebuke for their Pharisaism, those who might be inclined to suppose, that the embracing of Christ and his cross was not sufficient for their justification in the sight of God ; or that for sanctification anything more was required of them than an abiding in the love of Jesus ; or that a resolute casting of our care upon the Lord was much too easy a path to the possession of peace, or in whatever respect the way of the Gospel might appear to them too even and easy.

But now look at our Syrian. O it is a Divine miracle, which we behold ! There he stands suddenly made anew in body and soul. Not merely the leprous individual, but also the benighted heathen, the blinded worldling, the unbroken and damnable sinner was left behind in the watery grave, and an Israelite—what am I saying ?—a man of God, a servant of Jehovah, a saint, rose up from this baptismal washing. And this all-pervading renovation is the

work of a moment. Certainly, it is not a work of Divine despotism. The grace which was active in it, was founded upon justice, and rests on the atonement of the Lamb, "which was slain from the foundation of the world." In this case also, it is the great sacrifice alone, which unbinds the aiding hand of God from the cords of justice, and gives free liberty to the operation of the Divine creative power, where without it, only the destructive streams of his fiery indignation would have poured themselves. Ay, and in every instance of Divine healing and assistance which is experienced in the world, the blood of the Surety is alone glorified. Take away this basis of eternal love to sinners, and the earth will smoke and blaze in the flames of his wrath.

How Naaman acted on his return to the shore, we are not expressly informed; but if I might anywhere think myself enabled and justified in enlarging the narrative from my own conception, it is in this place. I see in spirit how the deeply-affected man comes—I might almost say—creeping to the shore; how he then silently casts himself upon the sacred soil, covers it with glowing kisses and grateful tears, would gladly speak, but is unable, because the tempest of his feelings chokes his utterance, and because no language seems copious enough to express the emotions which pervade him. "O what a God art thou?" is the exclamation of his inmost soul; and who amongst us does not join in this sentiment? Survey for once from its termination, the entire guidance of the Syrian, as it now lies before you, and confess whether anything more beautiful, connected, profoundly planned, and wisely calculated, can be imagined. You now perceive that whatever occurred, happened just as it ought to have done, and no otherwise, in order that the object might be attained. For this pur-

pose Naaman was obliged to make the trial of every earthly aid, in order to experience its worthlessness. It was necessary that he should be directed, not by the mouth of a human sage, but by a simple captive female, to proceed to the land of Israel. It was necessary that he should see king Jehoram rend his clothes, and hear him confess, that God alone was able to heal a leper. It was necessary that he should experience those humiliations at the prophet's threshold, of which we lately heard. It was necessary that he should there have advice given him, which seemed foolish to his reason; and as this advice offended him, it was necessary that he should be permitted to commence his return. And just at the very moment when his spiritual leprosy came to an eruption, when the most furious wrath boiled within him, and he opened his mouth like a barking dog against Jehovah and his seer, ay, and was on the point of swearing, in the rage of desperation, an implacable hatred against religion as well as against God and the land of Israel—just then, and not before, was it necessary that the hour of restoration should arrive. For every provision was now richly made, that with the cure of his body, the healing of his soul might be connected. Matters were now so ordered and arrangd, that if he were cleansed, he could no longer avoid two convictions; the one was, "It was Jehovah who healed me," and the other, "He sent help of his free grace, to one who was unworthy of it, to a wretch, to a sinner." These convictions now occupied his whole soul. The happy man lies upon his face, and dissolves in thankfulness, adoration, and contrition. We look at him with heart-felt emotion, and congratulate Israel on the possession of such a proselyte. And if in addition to this we might be permitted to suppose, that Naaman's servants also, profoundly captivated by such a

manifestation of the living God, are no longer able to keep their knees from the dust—O then we perceive, on the silent banks of the stream, a spectacle, at which even old Jordan itself might have broken out into tumultuous joy, and upon which the angels of God doubtless looked down with emotion and sublime delight.

After Naaman had offered his first sacrifice of homage and adoration, he again elevates himself from the dust, changes his clothes, reascends his chariot with youthful vigour, blesses once more the dear and wondrous stream, and gives orders to depart. “Back to Jericho!” exclaims he joyfully, and immediately the cavalcade moves forwards. A more beautiful triumphal procession had scarcely ever been seen in Israel; not Naaman’s indeed, but God’s. Naaman is only the candlestick, upon which the power of Jehovah’s grace displays its glory; the Lord’s trophy, the reflection of his beauty, a living bulletin of victory, replete with intelligence to the glory of God. Such is he, and such he also wishes to be. Hence he looks around him in such a free and dignified manner, as though he would say, “Behold, here in my countenance, in the purity of my frame, in the joyfulness of my looks, the reflection of the grace and glory of the Lord! O what are his feelings! He has entered into a new world, and a new state of existence. The prison walls of former darkness have fallen, and the kingdom of truth has opened to him its pearly gates. He has found the living God. He bathes in the mild radiance of his countenance. He reposes, like a happy favourite child, on his bosom. O blissful discovery, which comprises in it a thousand treasures, from which a whole firmament replete with delightful stars of hope flashes upon him, and which transfigures his existence even beyond death and the grave, and secures life itself to him. For in

finding God, he found in himself, though a child of the dust, the son of immortality ; he found eternity in time, and beyond the shades of death in the vale of tears, the unfading glory of heaven. He feels as if he were in a delightful dream. "Old things are passed away ; and lo ! all things are become new."

We likewise behold with heart-felt pleasure the renovated Syrian. He stands before us like an ingenious and highly significant hieroglyphic. His appearance is the gospel in substance and reality ; is the incarnate expression of incomparably precious things, and a leaf from the book of truth closely written on every side. Thou mayst derive more instruction from the appearance of this one individual, than from all the ponderous volumes of the wise of this world. In it thou beholdest the question respecting the existence of a living God, decided by the most convincing demonstration ; the personal operation of this God upon the world divested of every doubt ; and the governance of a free and royal grace as well as the creative breathing of a quickening spirit over the sepulchre of deceased humanity gloriously confirmed and elevated above contradiction. Nor is this all that presents itself to us in this individual. Even as he shines as a Divine seal upon the prophetic call of our Elisha—so he also adds a virtual yea, and amen ! to thousands of the Divine promises. He is a living epistle from Jehovah to sinners, expressive of his readiness, as well as his ability to deliver ; and, as the first-fruits of the great harvest of the heathen, he hovers like a benignant meteor between the death-like shades of our gloomy world.

And like him, so the ransomed of the Lord are all walking monuments, inscribed on every side with Divine characters. In the same manner, the stars in the canopy of the heavens, the flowers of the meadows, and the birds of

the air, are also expressions full of meaning. The regenerate form whole volumes, frequently unattractive as regards the material and the binding, but full of the profoundest subjects to him who is able to look into and peruse them. The attempt to apprehend God, in his mode of acting, and the hastening past these greatest works of his hands without devoting the smallest attention to them, is the consummated folly of natural philosophy. The *renovatum* in the appearance of a man in Christ, expresses more of God and his nature than all the rest of creation. In the salutary events of such an individual's life, thus spiritually renewed, the whole of the New Testament reflects itself, and finds in them, at the same time, its strongest confirmation. Here study, search, and dig, whoever is desirous of finding the treasure in the field of human nature. "Thy fellows that sit before" thee, said the Lord to Joshua the High Priest, "are men wondered at."

XV.

THE DECISION.

“**MAKE** thee an ark of gopher-wood, and enter thou into it with all thy house, that thou mayest live.” Thus spake the Lord to Noah his friend. And Noah conferred not with flesh and blood, but taking his reason captive under the word of the Lord, and paying no attention to the jeers of a scorning world, he began to build the wondrous vessel, and by this blind submission gave due glory to God.

A dreadful judgment awaited the world. A flood, which, scorning the strongest barriers, would foam even over the loftiest mountains, was selected as the instrument for destroying all flesh from off the earth. What a prospect for the children of Adam! But do not deceive yourselves! The same wrath which once poured forth that destructive deluge, flames to this hour against all those who are not born of God, and still daily washes down its unhappy victims, by the wave of death, into destruction. Are you desirous of building a vessel to save you in the hour of distress? Do not form it out of works and virtues. The justice of the eternal God is a sharp rock. Your bark will dash into a thousand pieces upon it. To the ark, dear brethren, to the ark! whoever amongst you loves his own soul.

“To the ark?” Yes, for an ark is also prepared for us. Look towards Bethlehem. There it lies, as it were, still upon dry ground. But soon it will be lifted up, and not have many more pleasant days. We shall perceive it struggling with the winds and the waves. It will cruise between rocks and whirlpools. Every storm will go over

it; the waves of reproach and persecution will cover it. Nay, at length it will even sink in bloody floods of death, but only in order soon to rise again, for the purpose of unfurling the flag of victory, and of steering full sail into the haven of eternal rest. Do you ask, "For what purpose is this dreadful voyage?" Look at Noah's ark. It, likewise, did not continue lying on the plain, but bent its course through the storm and breakers. "For what purpose?" To carry Noah and his family through. For a similar object, Christ the Living Ark, gives himself up to the floods of Divine wrath; for it is by this means that it becomes an ark of deliverance to all who take refuge in it.

When Noah's ark lay ready on the strand, it was a prophetic sign of evil to all who saw it. When the fire-engines rattle along the streets, we are aware that fire has broken out. When the people run with spades and wheelbarrows to the embankments, no one doubts that an inundation is threatened. When a king levies an army, marches out his troops, and causes fortifications to be erected, it is evident what hour has struck in his kingdom. And when the Almighty himself sends not merely a prophet or an angel, but his only-begotten Son for the rescue of the world, what shall we then think? How great must be the existing danger, when such arrangements are necessary to remove it! Yes, the mere existence of Jesus in the world, is the most powerful sermon on the lost condition of mortals that ever was preached. The cross, that wondrous sign of our exaltation, intimates to us, at the same time, in a deeply affecting manner, so as nothing else can, the abyss of destruction, in which by nature we are plunged.

Noah's ark was completed. The fountains of the great deep were then broken up, and the windows of heaven

thrown open ; and Noah went into the ark, as the Lord his God had commanded him. The entrance into the true ark takes place under similar circumstances. This is the case when the waters come upon us. No one goes into it dry-shod and with dry eyes. We must first feel the wrath, and then be delivered from the curse. Through anguish on account of sin, to the heart of Jesus ; such is the method.

If you now inquire what is implied by an entrance into the true ark—know, first of all, that we can enter into Christ by using our eyes ; and this we do as often as we thoughtfully contemplate the fullness of the riches which are treasured up in him. Secondly, by prayer ; and we enter into him by this means, when we ask some particular thing of him, even as the lepers, mentioned in the gospel, who exclaimed, “ Lord, heal us.” But such-like entrances are not sufficient for our eternal deliverance. The entrance into him, which is like that of Noah into the ark, is caused by our feeling the pressure of the wrath of the eternal Judge, and seeing no other refuge either in heaven or on earth, but in his wounds ; the entrance into his suretyship and into his bleeding sacrifice, with the entire hope of a heart which ardently thirsts after grace, is the true and proper entrance, and that which saves the soul.

When Noah had entered the ark, the Lord shut the door upon him. This act does not immediately take place in the spiritual antitype. The door continues open a long time with respect to many, who have cast themselves into the arms of Jesus, so that they still possess a free and painful view of the desert of their past life. But before they are aware, the Lord closes the door upon them. The terrific retrospect is suddenly hidden from their view. The mountains of their sins are removed by a mighty hand.

They know that they have obtained mercy, and that everything is atoned for, forgotten, and forgiven.

When the Lord had shut the door upon Noah, the latter was at once separated from a wicked world. And when the Lord liberates us from the world we are really delivered from it. We may be able to separate the body from the world, but not the heart. But if Jesus shuts the door, it is really closed. We are then inwardly estranged from the world. And if we were even desirous of returning to the world and its ways, we should be unable to do so, and constantly find the gates barred, and the barriers insurmountable.

The Lord shut the door upon Noah. When this was done, Noah was removed from the view of those who were left behind; and thus it is with all who enter into the true ark. The world knows them no more. They travel incognito. Their life is hid with Christ in God. But what do they care, whether the world is able to comprehend and value them or not; it is enough for them that "the Lord knoweth them that are his." They know that they are beloved by him and regarded with acceptance. What more would they have?

The Lord shut the door. Noah was then safe. The waves could not break in upon him, and he was also secured from falling out into the waters. In a similar manner those are shut in, who are in Christ. "My sheep," says the Lord, "shall never perish, neither shall any one pluck them out of My hand. My father who hath given them to me, is greater than all; and no man can pluck them out of my Father's hand."

When the door was shut upon Noah, he was carried out into the watery waste. The flood increased and lifted up the ark, and bore it aloft above the high places of the earth.

How often did the ark, in all probability, cruise between rocks and whirlpools? How many times may the billows of destruction have menacingly broken over it! But what of that? Our mariner sat untouched by them, and even in the most horrifying depths, felt safe in his floating citadel.

Thus courageously do thou also steer through the ocean of life. If thou art in Christ the true ark, let the tempest roar around thee as it pleases; thou art safe. However much the waves of temptation and tribulation may break over thee, be not afraid. If a shock even cast thee down from thy seat or thy couch; still thou art far from sinking into the flood; thou still remainest in the ark; and wilt continue there until the day of landing, and until thou shalt cast anchor on the Ararat, of an eternal and sabbatic repose. Happy mariner, sail away in peace, and rejoice in the olive-leaf of promise in the mouth of the dove! Naaman also enters the ark this day. Come and let us rejoice with him, and wish him happiness on this path of peace!

2 KINGS v. 15, 16.

“And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him, and he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant.

“But he said, As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take it, but he refused.”

The miraculous cure has been performed; renovated both in body and soul, we beheld the happy Syrian come forth from the waves of the stream. This day we pluck flowers in the garden of his renewed mind. The door is widely opened. Every veil departs. We direct our reflections, first, to NAAMAN'S CONFESSION, and then to HIS

OFFER. May the Lord grant us a draught of heavenly consolation and refreshment from the earthen vessel of our present meditation !

I.

Three astonishing changes present themselves to our view in the kingdom of nature. The first is, when a small seed dies in the lap of earth, and rises again in the verdant and flowery splendour of a youthful tree. The next is, when under a warm and feathery covering, life develops itself in an egg, and a winged bird breaks singing through the shell. The third is, when a creeping caterpillar is transformed into a butterfly, which with glittering and delicate wing, rocks itself upon the flowers. Three transmutations similar to those just mentioned, only still more sublime and wonderful, meet us in the kingdom of grace. The first, which is an invisible one, occurs, when by the act of justification, a naked sinner instantly becomes a spotless saint of God. The second is, when in the act of regeneration, the Almighty applies his creating hand a second time to man, and breathes new life into one who was spiritually dead. The third is, when at the moment of glorification, the weary pilgrim lays aside the ponderous travelling cloke of his body, and, beautiful as the angels of God, soars aloft into the circle of the just made perfect. Naaman has already experienced the two first of the transmutations just mentioned. Faith alone, indeed, can only comprehend all that he now is in the sight of God. The personal transformation of which he was the subject, shines brightly, on the contrary, in the appearance he presents, and is like a city set upon a hill, and like a light upon a lofty candlestick.

Naaman again arrives in Jericho with his numerous

retinue. Amidst the pressure of the gaping crowd the cavalcade moves slowly through the streets. It is most assuredly a triumphal procession, and that too of Jehovah, who leads about the restored leper in triumph, and who holds up to public view the booty, which, with one blow of his sword, he has rescued from the hands of Satan. But what is there to be seen in the man? O, not a little that is beautiful and delightful. What a lovely escort is that which accompanies him on his return! He brings the living God with him from Jordan. Angels hover round him exulting. Peace, with its palm-branch, sits on his right, and hope on his left, with images of paradise. What an incomparable array bedecks him! This crystalline body, washed by the Almighty's own hand! This soul, purified in the bath of God's forgiving grace, and clothed in the righteousness of the fairest of the children of men! What a plenitude of light, rapture, and love within! Certainly never did a diver return from his watery mine, laden with such a noble treasure, as this man, who has found, in his regenerating immersion, a hoard of pearls, which will rejoice him through all eternity.

He joyfully orders halt to be made a second time before Elisha's cottage, and immediately scenes occur, which, compared with the former ones, only complete our admiration of the all-pervading renovation which Naaman has experienced. You now seek in vain for the proud courtier, who previously felt himself so deeply offended by Elisha's reserve. The lion is become a lamb. A humble and courteous individual descends from the chariot, and hastens personally to enter the cottage, and to present to the prophet the assurances of the most reverential affection. The obstinate heathen with his "I thought," is left behind in the watery grave of the Jordan. An enlightened man of

God, who is now well aware how that which is truly Divine presents itself to view, has taken his place. The rude warrior, who was almost beside himself with rage and vexation, died; and a person, gentle and peaceful as a dove, has risen from his ashes. The deluded individual to whom the instructions of the prophet, to go and wash seven times in Jordan, appeared only as mockery and folly, has now left the stage; and we salute in his stead, a child of light, with the living belief in his soul, that Jehovah is glorious and holy in all his ways.

Naaman is on the point of entering into Elisha's cottage, when the prophet meets him with a friendly greeting and gratulation. O what celestial rills of sanctified love and delight mingle together from the hearts of Naaman and Elisha! What lovely emanations of the most ardent gratitude unitedly ascend, like the clouds of incense, from these two living altars, to the throne of Jehovah! Overpowered with deep emotion, the two individuals stand silently opposite to each other; the happy stranger then opens his mouth, and the feelings which agitate him, break forth into a confession, which by the excellence of its contents, not less than by the energetic decision with which it is uttered, causes us the most pleasing astonishment. "Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel." Thus speaks the man, who a few hours before, went about in the fetters of the most deplorable darkness. The infernal charm is dissolved, the snare is broken, the bird has escaped. A new creature, born of God, stands in unveiled beauty before our eyes.

This confession is nothing else than the irrevocable letter of divorce, in which Naaman renounces the service of his idols—the weapon of Samson, with which, as it respects himself, he lays, with one blow, the temples of Baal

and Rimmon in eternal ruin—the joyful farewell, which he for ever exultingly bids to the kingdom of darkness—the cheerful war-cry, with which he places himself beneath the standard of Zion, and the first wreath of homage and devotedness, which he deposits upon the altar of Jehovah. In these words, he declares all who cleave to any other god beside the God of Israel, to be servants of lies. He casts, by this expression, the religion of his native country as a tissue of error from him. Nor can Naaman feel concerned, whether those who surround him are satisfied with this, or as to what Benhadad may say to it. And even if it cost him his rank, station, and his life into the bargain, “Let them go,” are his thoughts, “there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel.”

And this confession continues eternally true, if by Israel, we imagine to ourselves that people, which believing on the sure prophecy, penetrate through the gate of the consciousness of guilt into the blood-besprinkled sanctuary of the New Testament kingdom of grace. It is there only that God is known, felt, and experienced, and nowhere else. It is there only, that he comes forth from his inaccessible light, and the heavenly throng exultingly exclaim, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men!” It is there only, that the moving of his feet, the light of his countenance, the words of his lips, are seen and heard. Jerusalem is there—there the temple, there the ark. The Rationalist, the Deist, and the Pantheist possess also the idea of a God, but have no God. In the best case, only an ideal, but not the living God. Their closet is empty, and they are unable to say anything to us of “the friend of solitude,” nothing of his open ear for their complaints, nor of his open bosom for their cares. Empty as their closet, is likewise their heart. Ah, it is only a gloomy world, unvisited

by Divine communications, bare of all experience of Divine influence, and a wild thoroughfare of the gloomy spirits of carnal thoughts and passions! Their whole existence is void and desolate. They see no Jacob's ladder reaching up to heaven; they experience no scenes like those on Horeb and Tabor; they hear no steps of an invisible Deity at their side; and guidance, visitation, and answers to prayer, are words to them without marrow or substance. Yes, it is really, as John says, "He that abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, has no God." "There is no God in all the earth, but in Israel." "Happy art thou, O Israel! who is like unto thee, O thou people, saved of the Lord!"

The happiest man upon earth—nay, the only happy man, is the "man in Christ." In him thou beholdest at the same time, the most important, as well as the most mysterious phenomenon under heaven. His exterior, indeed, betrays at most but little or nothing of his importance. That which distinguishes him from others is within. Let us call up, for once, such an individual before us; we will question him and he shall answer us. We first inquire respecting his family connexions. We ask, Whence art thou? He points upwards. Where does thy father dwell? Near and afar off, is the reply. How far off? As far as heaven is from the earth. How near? As near as the mother is to the suckling which reposes on her bosom. What is thy Father? He is an architect. What has he built? The world. What is he? A bearer. What does he bear? All things by the word of his power. What more is he? A landlord. Who dines at his table? The eyes of all wait upon him. Anything more? He is a pilot. Where does he sit? At the helm, even of my little vessel. And what is his name? "The Lord of Hosts."

What, is God thy Father? Yes, God is my Father. In the sense that he is so to all? No, as he is to but few. Why doest thou call him thy Father? Because he loves me with paternal affection. For any other reason? I was begotten by him. In that case thou art of high rank? Yes, of the very highest. And dost thou possess great riches? My treasure is God. And wouldst thou exchange with any one? No, not with a seraph. Art thou then not a sinner in the sight of God? No. What then? Righteous and acceptable. In thyself? By no means. In whom then? In the eternal Lamb of God.

Hear what language this is! And yet this glorying has a deep and sacred foundation. He that has received the baptism of the Spirit, be he who he may, is justified in thus replying to us. With reference to him, every thing is done away, which could inflame the wrath of God, and everything brought nigh, which ought to kindle his love. Here there is no longer any transgression; Christ took it upon himself. No longer any debt; Christ paid it. No longer any curse; for Christ endured it. No longer any nakedness; Christ covered it with his glory. Moses here finds no longer any cause to protest against the salvation of the sinner, nor Satan any reason to blaspheme the Lord because he pardons those that are worthy of damnation; eternal justice no longer any ground for hindering forgiving love, and binding its hands. By the exaltation and glorification of the transgressor, none of the bearings of righteousness and justice are in any respect infringed upon or overthrown; for here is nothing but obedience and meritorious virtue on the side of those who are thus exalted. Whatever the holy Surety was, performed, and accomplished, who is all—that the atoned-for sinner performed and accomplished. It was for his account. Where is the

wonder, therefore, that God not merely magnanimously spares these heirs and bearers of the whole beauty of his Son, but embraces them with tenderness, presses them with pleasure to his heart, and looks upon them, in the full sense of the words, as his children and his favourites?

But we will proceed to our examination of "the man in Christ." He will still have much that is pleasing to say to us respecting his prospects for the future. We inquire, How dost thou subsist? I am a boarder, is his reply. Hast thou property? None, and yet am supremely rich. None? I live upon charity. And yet thou art supremely rich? One who is immensely rich said to me, "What is mine, is thine also." Art thou then in want of nothing? Of one thing alone. And what is that? That I do not sufficiently believe in my riches. Where does thy benefactor live? He dwells on high. And does he provide thee with every thing? "Cast all your care upon him, for he careth for you." Thou art therefore afraid of nothing? What should I be afraid of? Will nothing evil befall thee? Nothing evil. And thou wilt experience only what is salutary and beneficial? Nothing else. Wilt thou never be tempted any more? Probably I may; but I shall conquer. And shall no affliction happen to thee? I do not know. And yet thou knowest that only what is desirable will befall thee? Desirable, I do not say. What then? I say, what is good. Therefore invariably only what is good? Yes, for I trust and do not doubt that God will turn to my good every evil which he sends me in this vale of tears, because as an omnipotent God, he can do it, and as a faithful father he will do it. Such are the sounds which proceed from Jerusalem; such is the language of the true Christian! He who is in Christ, and yet scruples to express himself thus, is ignorant of his rank. His privileges justify him in using still bolder language.

But to return to our Syrian. "Now I know," exclaims he exultingly, "that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel." Yes, now he knows that Jehovah lives; for he bears the seal of his truth in his purified body, and his cleansed and regenerate soul, which is imbued with celestial peace. His knowledge is founded on his own consciousness and experience. And certainly it is only in this soil, that faith blooms and flourishes. As long as it rests upon mere hearsay—it is a faded plant and unworthy of the name. It becomes "the victory that overcometh the world," only when it has taken root in the individual's own experience of Divine communications and proofs of favour, and when we can say with Peter, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye witnesses of his majesty." It is only then that our confession has its full tone, and our conviction marrow in its bones and brazen feet. It is then that the storms of blasphemous assaults roll high above us; their lightnings do not strike, nor their thunders affright us. No reproach discourages us. We believe what a whole world denies; for "we have beheld his glory." Acuteness and wit succeed to demonstration in proving that the Gospel contains merely a fable, a tissue of legends. We stand beyond the reach of these arrows. "We beheld his glory," and saw it in such an unambiguous light, that compassion is only excited within us, when we hear it questioned, whether he be a God, and a living God. We bear the seal that he is so on our inner man. The new heart which he has given us; the spark from on high which he has kindled within us; the inexpressible peace which we enjoy in him; the answers to prayer which we can relate; the wondrous aid which we have experienced; the refreshing visits which he vouchsafes to us—these and many other things elevate us to

a height of conviction, from which we behold the scruples of the inexperienced passing away like the vapours of the valley deeply beneath our feet. "We beheld his glory." Yes, this is the incentive to our courageous confession; this our panoply in an antichristian age; this the impenetrable golden shield, which secures us against the most dexterously aimed strokes of the father of lies. A faith which rests only upon demonstration, cannot fight its way through the storms of life. Satan has never been afraid of philosophic weapons. But the war-cry, "We beheld his glory," makes him tremble; for it indicates to him that a legion is on the march against him, which will assuredly tread him down under their feet.

II.

Naaman connects with his joyful and decided confession, an offer, which has reference to the prophet. "Now therefore," says he, "I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant." By this he means, be pleased to accept a present in gold, silver, or festive garments. Naaman's intentions were cordial and sincere. He had no idea of paying or recompensing. He only felt impelled to express, in some outward manner, his grateful feelings, and to lay at the feet of that God, who had healed him, in his servant and instrument, a token of homage and affection. That nothing more than this delicate feeling of sincere acknowledgment constituted the basis of his offer, he gives us himself clearly to perceive, in calling himself, though a man of rank and authority, not only in deep humility a servant of Elisha's, but also in *begging* him with a kind of noble bashfulness, not to despise the gift, as if he meant to say, "I am well aware that it will be of no service to thee; but thou wilt, by so doing, cheer and lighten my heart."

And which of us, my brethren, who has experienced a similar renovation, does not understand how to appreciate such sentiments? Where is the man, upon whom the Sun of Righteousness has once shone with healing in his wings, who has not felt the impulse to render homage, dedication, and sacrifice, which, at such seasons, is wont to be kindled in the soul, and craves satisfaction, or else threatens to consume the heart with its flame? These are the blessed moments, when compelled by the constraining love of Christ, those mites flow into the Divine treasury, which the Lord values more than whole talents of gold given by others. These are the seasons of mercy, in which those works are performed, of which it is said, "They follow the saints," and with reference to which, "the left hand knoweth not what the right hand doeth." They are the happy times when we feed and clothe Christ in our brethren; and yet at the last day, we shall not be able to remember a single good deed, which we have done to Jesus. They are the bright moments, when the branches of the vine flourish and yield their grapes, unconscious of the beautiful attire in which they are arrayed. Yes, it is true what the royal harper sings, "I will run in the way of thy commandments, because thou hast enlarged my heart."

True Christians resemble those flowers, which shut themselves up during the night, and hang down their heads devoid of perfume; but no sooner are they touched by the first ray of the genial morning sun, than they again open their bosoms, stretch upwards, expanding their refreshed petals to the monarch of day, and again stand like lovely altars, which diffuse nothing around them but fragrance and refreshment. You cannot attend better to your sanctification, than by reflecting how you may immerse yourselves ever deeper into the love of God, and bathe more

continually in the waves of his grace. Ah, if but a single beam of that love falls into our hearts, how able is it to render fruitful the barren field, and to cause the wilderness to flourish! It is for this reason that we preach to you so frequently, respecting all the blessings which you possess in Christ Jesus. With this we water the soil, or nothing in heaven or on earth can do it. Joy in the Lord, is the bubbling fountain of all that is beautiful and holy. May this fountain flow still more abundantly amongst us! If, with reference to our congregation, we are compelled to lament with once of old, and say, "God help us! how is it that with so much talk about spiritual life, there is so little manifestation of it?" We explain to ourselves the lamentable phenomenon simply from the circumstance, that so many of our brethren are well aware that the Lord, is good, but do not taste and become inwardly conscious of it; otherwise our Church would be a garden of lilies, and there would be no end to the incense, which would rise from our domestic altars.

Elisha certainly feasted himself heartily on the beautiful spiritual flower, which expanded its petals, in the offer expressed in the words, "Now therefore, take, I pray thee, a blessing from thy servant." He was however, satisfied with the sight of it. He could not accept the offered gift. "As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand," says he, with solemn earnestness, "I will receive none." Naaman has then recourse to entreaty. "Think not," replies he, "that I seek to repay Jehovah for the benefit he has bestowed upon me, or that I erroneously take the instrument of his aid, for him who sent the help. Nor do not suspect that I imagine I should be doing thee a service. Thou art conferring an obligation upon me, by not disdaining my present; for I feel impelled to consecrate myself with hand

and mouth to the Lord. Take therefore a blessing!" But Elisha, who partook of the apostle's sentiment, "I seek not yours, but you," persists in his refusal. "Say no more of it. As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none." It is easy to conceive why he rejected the gift. It was intended that every thing should unite, to bring to light the truth, that where Jehovah blesses, grace reigns, and grace alone. It was therefore again the Lord's glory alone, which governed the conduct of the prophet. That no one in Syria might say, the gift of God was to be had for money, or that he was a respecter of persons, was the cause of his firm declaration, "As the Lord liveth, I will receive none." The glorification of Jehovah was always the primary object which the servants of God had in view. Like faithful knights who are desirous of serving their king without pay, they burned only for the honour of his name. But these exalted sentiments clothed their whole deportment with that wonderful nobleness which imparts to us a feeling of veneration towards them, as towards persons of a higher and more than earthly origin, and taught them that sacred tact in every situation, which never suffered them to deviate from the decorum of the station they occupied, as Jehovah's envoys and office-bearers.

Elisha was poor; the sons of the prophets no less so. Another in Elisha's place would have thought, on hearing Naaman's offer, "The present comes very opportunely; God intends to provide for us by it." And the satisfaction at the appearance of temporal assistance, would have beclouded his spirit in such a manner, that no room would have been left for the more important consideration, whether the honour of Jehovah did not require the rejection rather than the acceptance of the gift. But Elisha

was not so much concerned about his outward support, as to be incapable, when a temporal favour fell into his lap, of any other feeling than that of extraordinary joy at receiving the gift as such. The conviction that he who feeds the sparrows and clothes the lilies, would not suffer him to perish for want, was too current with him to permit the appearance of such-like Divine aid, in seasons of necessity even, to surprise him. He was therefore able to look with an impartial eye upon the temporal benefits bestowed upon him, and felt no difficulty, when it seemed advisable to him, in subjecting earthly gain and advantage to superior considerations, nay, even in offering them up again joyfully, in the certain confidence, that he would be assisted in some other manner.

A pleasing trait from the history of a Romish saint here occurs to me. This saint—for he deserves the name—is Johannes à Cruce, the founder of the order of Carmelites, a man distinguished by his ardent love for the Lord, as well as by his childlike faith in the word of God, and his unshaken confidence in the letter of the promises of Scripture. The convent of which this venerable man was the prior, was poor, and possessed nothing, except when the Lord excited from time to time the liberality of charitable individuals to manifest itself towards it. Hence the fraternity were occasionally in circumstances of destitution; and the days did not unfrequently occur, when they were compelled to console themselves with the passage, that “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” A day of this kind had again occurred, and it happened that when the hungry brethren were assembled for dinner in the refectory, and the table was spread, and the dishes placed upon it, nothing was found either in the cellar or larder, after a minute

search, but a piece of dry bread. There was therefore no great necessity to have spread the table ; however they gave this poor remainder of what they possessed a hearty welcome, placed it upon the table, implored a blessing upon it, and then sat down in order to divide the dry crust in fragments amongst them. But before this was done, Johannes rose up from his seat, with a heavenly cheerfulness in every feature, opened his pleasingly eloquent mouth, and addressed to the brethren, words of encouragement and consolation concerning the love of God in Christ, and the great promises he has given to his people, so that all of them rose up delighted and refreshed, and without partaking of the bread, returned to their cells. But scarcely had the deeply affected conventuals reached their silent retreats, when the bell rang loudly at the gate of the monastery, and on its being opened by the porter, a man entered, carrying a large covered basket in his hand, and presented him with a letter to Johannes, the prior. The porter left the unknown individual with his load, standing in the passage, and hastened with the letter to the prior's cell. He found the pious man on his knees in prayer, "Pardon me, father," said he, reverentially and timidly, "here is a letter for you." Johannes raised himself up, took the letter, broke it open, and began to read ; but scarcely had he arrived at the close, than he dropped the letter from his hand, cast his eyes upon the ground, and began to weep bitterly. The porter, surprised at this behaviour, said to him, "Father, why do you weep ? Have you not often said that we ought not to weep and be grieved at anything but our sins ?" To which Johannes replied, "Brother, I do not weep without reason ; think how weak the Lord must see our faith to be, since he is unwilling to let us suffer a little want, even for a single day, without

visible aid. He foresaw that before evening, we should become confused and despond, unless he were to send immediate help to our faith, by means of this charitable gift. It is because we possess so little confidence in the rich Lord, in whom we are encouraged to trust, that my tears flow. But because the Lord will have it so, go, and receive the gift which he sends us." You see, that this man, like Elisha, was also elevated above temporal favours; and the appearance of earthly succour did not so entirely carry him away, as to leave no room in his heart for other and still higher feelings than those of delight at the deliverance which he experienced.

O that the Lord might elevate us likewise to a station, from which we might also possess a free, unobstructed, and cheerful view of the circumstances in which he places us! May he afford to our eyes such an unobstructed prospect, refine our feelings to such a state of sacred delicacy, and increasingly divest the flour of the Divine life within us from its ponderous and fleshly covering! The new man acting at liberty, is the most beautiful object under the sun. And how can he be otherwise? He is created after God, and by God, and is the image of Christ. He is the reflection of the sun in the drop of the morning dew except that he is a living image, an image become reality—Christ in us—God glorified in a worm!

XVI.

THE GRATITUDE OF NAAMAN.

YOU know the words which we find in Heb. xii. 26—28, “Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we, receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear.” Words that are like a deep sea, who will fathom them! The lead is wanting for the purpose. In its absence, let us sink the net into the deep, in order to fish at least a handful of pearls out of it.

The Apostle reminds the brethren in the context, that they had left the Sinaitic economy, and were come to that of the New Testament. He connects with this remembrance, a serious warning, whilst reminding them that the despising of the Gospel of grace renders a man more reprobate than the transgression of the law. He further calls to their minds, how the voice of the Son of God, at the giving of the law, shook the earth; but that a thousand years later, the Lord had said by Haggai, “Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens and the earth.” These prophetic words refer to the period of the new covenant, and began to be fulfilled with its establishment in Christ. History shows what a shaking commenced from that time amongst mankind. The sound of the Gospel penetrated

through the world, and wherever it was heard—tumults, revolutions, and uproar ensued, sleeping lions awoke, and showed their teeth; but the children of darkness became light, and cried Hosannah! The hoary edifices of superstition fell into ruins at the sound. Ancient prejudices, customs, and manners, suddenly made way for a new order of things. Whole nations changed their internal and external form. Laws, constitutions, civil regulations—all were forcibly carried away into a vortex of transformation. Charitable institutions, previously unknown, sprang forth out of the chaos, and flourished in vernal beauty. Completely new creations were called forth, as if by magic, in defiance of the foaming rage of numerous foes. Movements of a thousand different kinds took place in every direction, and without such a shaking, nothing occurred whithersoever the Gospel penetrated; and such is also the case to this hour.

But the movement, which commenced with the entrance of the kingdom of Christ into the world, did not confine itself merely to the earth. Heaven also was shaken. What a movement took place there, when the Eternal Son prepared to clothe himself in our flesh, and the astonished angels descended to sing his first cradle-hymn! What a movement took place, when he, who is life itself, became the victim of a bloody death! What a joyful emotion at his priestly return into the upper sanctuary, accompanied by the malefactor! What a movement, when so many children of God were introduced into the eternal glory! and this movement will continue as long as the heavens shall receive Christ, as Peter says, “until the times of restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” This saying is being accomplished even to the present hour; for Christ

and his spiritual members are one; and it will only be when he has them all with him in the world above, that the promise shall be entirely fulfilled.

But now let us hear what our Apostle says further. We have not yet heard what he means chiefly to reveal to us in the words. He observes to us, that in this announcement of the Lord by Haggai, something more is contained, than a prediction of those movements in heaven and on earth, which should accompany the introduction of the kingdom of Christ into the world. In the words, "Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven," the Lord intimated at the same time, the great changes which would occur in the lapse of ages. "And this word, Yet once more," says the Apostle, "signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain." There are consequently, things in the world which may be shaken, that is, such as are liable to perish or be changed. This comprises all that which was made and called into existence with the intention of being mutable and subject to change, and to exist only for a certain space of time, in order that those things which cannot be shaken may abide and remain. To these unstable things belongs, for instance, the Levitical typical economy of the Old Testament. It was intended only to last for a time, and then vanish away. But the Jews, in their blindness, clung closely to it as if it were immutable; hence the needless desperation they manifested, when the fire-brand of dissolution was hurled into it. They did not dream for a moment, that that which is immutable was to be sought for in the quiet shepherd's tents of an Abraham and an Isaac, or in the lowly cottages of a Simeon, a Zacharias, or a Hannah. That which presented a splendid appear-

ance, like the pomp of the typical priesthood, they regarded as belonging to the things which could not be shaken ; and when at length the whole temple was destroyed, they cried out, "Ichabod—our glory is departed !" and then, instead of joyfully embracing that which is immutable, they cherished the vain hope of restoring that which is mutable, although irrecoverably lost.

To the things that can be shaken, belongs all that is earthly, however it may shine and glitter, and however durable it may appear. When we unfold the history of nations before us, upon what do we walk ? Under our feet lie whole strata of states that have sunk into oblivion, princely families that have become extinct, royal thrones that have mouldered away, systems of religion that have been long buried, and faded glories, both intellectual and material. The dust of transitoriness covers them, and their place is known no more. The storm of annihilation blows rudely and piercingly upon us from every quarter ; on all sides, in the tangible characters of history, the inscription meets our eye, "That which can be shaken is subject to vicissitude ; that which is mutable, passes away !" Yea, thou beholdest it on almost everything which attracts thy attention. It stands upon the foundation of the city which thou inhabitest, for the latter also only occupies the period which God has prescribed to it, and then ceases to be. This inscription stands written upon the political and civil relations under which thou livest. These also belong to the things that can be shaken. It stands inscribed upon the pleasing family circle, in which thou feelest so happy. This also is a flower of the field. Thou mayest read it likewise on the official station which thou fillest ; on the position in human society which thou occupiest ; ay, and even on thy own forehead ; for

thou belongest also in part, to the things that are mutable and may be shaken. Thus everything around thee is a transient and shadowy scene. However excellent or glorious it may be, it fulfils its destined period; a destroying storm, which it is unable to resist, then claps its wings over it. And though it were the earth itself, and the heaven with its suns and constellations, yet the former shall at length change its form, and the latter shall be folded up like a scroll. What folly therefore to attach ourselves so closely to that which may be shaken! Establish yourselves, my brethren, in that which cannot be shaken. But is there such a thing? Yes, there is, in the midst of such universal agitation and vicissitude.

If we return to the huge cemetery of the world's history, we meet, amidst the general overthrow, a phenomenon which remains, which survives everything, and rises up again unconsumed out of every vortex of change, which would seek to swallow it up, and appears to be indestructible and eternal. If we go back to the beginning of the world; this phenomenon is coeval with it. Our eye wanders through centuries after centuries, and where does it not meet us? We perceive it at first, confined to a little speck on earth. But in the course of eighteen hundred years, it fills many countries, islands, and nations. But what is it? A temple, a living temple; but such a one as no Nebuchadnezzar can plunder, nor can a Titus hurl into it the torch of destruction. A human family, a host of quiet brethren; we find them, with cheerful looks, surrounding a table, which shows us first a paschal lamb, then a mysterious bread, and a cup of blessing. They sing, and the fundamental note of their melody is, "Hosannah!" One like unto the Son of Man, stands with a friendly aspect in the midst of them. He is the object of

their love, their sole and entire hope. They bear his cross. Despised for his sake on all occasions, they esteem his reproach more highly than all the treasures of Egypt. They are, it is true, in the world, but only as a silent company of travellers, who are passing through it. They cast their anchor on the heavenly shores. They exclaim, "Abba, Father!" and hasten to the arms of Him who is gracious to them. You perceive of what I am speaking. The phenomenon I allude to, is the kingdom of grace, as it stands rooted in the eternal counsels of mercy, and in the blood of a holy and spotless lamb; the peaceful kingdom of those holy souls, who, clothed in white robes, and anointed with the Spirit of life, regard themselves as dead unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ. This hidden kingdom, with its statutes, possessions, prospects, and customs, is the only thing which cannot be shaken in this world of vicissitude and mutability. This will remain when heaven and earth pass away, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. It will remain, with respect to its king, its constitution, and its individual subjects; and if it can no longer continue on earth, heaven opens itself to receive it. It will exist when everything else shall have perished, or changed its nature. Many of the forms, relative circumstances, and outward observances in which it appears here below, are mutable; but the kingdom itself is immutable; it flourishes for eternity, and will exist even without catechisms, articles of faith, or any external organization. It survives every flaming pile, and even the great and final conflagration; and it will also outlive all the horrors and desolations of death.

"Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace," is the exhortation of the Apostle. Like the kingdom itself, the order observed in it, "Saved by grace," is eternal and immutable. Let us

therefore not act like some, who, after having received grace, suddenly fall again upon works, and make their peace dependant on the degree of personal holiness to which they have attained. These characters mistake that which is immutable, and class it again under that which is mutable. They make a change in the nature of the kingdom of grace, and transform it again into a kingdom, in which the law rules, though in a more subtle manner. But by so doing, they act inconsistently. The kingdom of grace must remain a kingdom of grace to all eternity. Grace alone bore rule, does so still, and will continue to do so. Let us therefore think only of this one thing, how the sun of grace may invariably shine upon us; but let this one thing suffice us, and let our hearts believe they have obtained the prize, when in possession of grace.

After thousands of years have elapsed, we this day offer the hand of fraternal fellowship to a man, who again presents himself as a living witness, that ours is a kingdom which cannot be moved. His heart is like our hearts; his hope like our hopes, his state like ours, his faith like ours. And in the way in which he was saved, are we also saved to the present hour. Naaman has found that which cannot be moved in the world of mutability. We heartily congratulate him upon it, and rejoice at the great discovery he has made.

2 KINGS v. 17.

“And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant, two mules’ burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord.”

The inmost soul of our Syrian develops itself more and more to our view. Even the private recesses of his heart

unfold themselves to us. The regenerate are generally like inclosed gardens, over the walls of which, only here and there the branches of the trees project, which play in the celestial breeze. We are here permitted for once to roam about at pleasure in such a garden of God, and to contemplate close at hand the flowers and murmuring rivulets which it contains. And how pleasant it is to wander in such a peaceful world, which is pervaded by the light of Paradise, where the discords of natural emotions are swallowed up by the harmony of Divine dispositions and sentiments, and where the melody of a desire after God points out a more beauteous spring than the world is acquainted with; whilst the rose of pure love reveals to us who that Gardener is, to whom but the smallest tribute which belongs to him is paid, when we fall at his feet, with Mary Magdalen's exclamation, "Rabboni!" NAAMAN'S INWARD STATE, RESOLUTE DECLARATION, and PLEASING REQUEST, are the three points which form the subject of our present consideration.

I.

You have already seen from his confession what kind of a man we have to do with in the person of the Syrian general. We have here, not merely one who has experienced a momentary awakening; one whom the arrow of grace has only slightly grazed, without killing him. Here is a decided partizan of the Holy One of Israel. A man who is wholly and completely that which he is. A new heart was given him. What joy did it cause Elisha to see this heathen so speedily attain to such a measure of newness of life. I could envy him the satisfaction; and the more so, because the words of Micah, "They shall break through," are so seldom fulfilled amongst us. There is a

want amongst Christians of the present day of such as are so entirely, and the majority of them are only half what they ought to be. Whether the world is their mother, or Jerusalem that is above, remains a question. Whether they are in bondage to the law, or have been made free by the Gospel, is never decided. If awakenings occur, the work is tedious and fatiguing to patience. The children come to the birth, but there is no strength to bring forth. A rush is made towards the strait gate, and then a halt suddenly ensues, and after that a languid retrograde movement. Soon the individual is excited anew, and his language is, "I will return to the Lord;" and he moves his feet; but there is no resolute walking upon the narrow way. Repeated assurances, but no decision. A continual appearance, as if about to swear allegiance to the Saviour, but no cheerful performance. Frequently a pleasing sprouting forth; but when we are ready to sing our vernal hymns, a nightly frost sets in, and the tender herb turns black and dies. Occasionally, even the hope-giving blossom of a tear, a moving confession, or a fervent vow; but the blossom drops off; no fruit is produced. An ascending to Him that is above, like the vapoury clouds which, early on a summer's morning, skim around our hills, and would also gladly rise on high; but, held by the clod from which they originated, are unable to do so, and finally disperse into nothing between the ridges. A fluttering, like swallows, about the turrets of Zion, but no settling down, like that of which the Psalmist sings, "The sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest."

Naaman's vigorous decision is explained by the circumstance, that he made choice of the Lord after the Lord had chosen him. There is a certain kind of seeking the Lord, which proceeds entirely from the individual himself. The

impulse to it does not emanate from God, and excites a mere human determination. Beloved relatives are converted; the man will likewise be so. An intimate friend enters upon the way of salvation: how can he think of remaining behind! He perceives the serious aspect of the times, and probably wishes also to possess a God who is able to help and console. He sees that the Lord's people prosper, and he desires to share in their prosperity. Accordingly, he seeks, in a certain way, the kingdom of God, but "I tell you, that many shall *seek* to enter in, and shall not be able." Even if such persons pray, perform devotional exercises, and slip themselves into godliness as into a ready-made coat; yet the result is only a piece of mummery. It is a Christian puppet which is thus formed; but no true Christian. Seeking to apprehend Christ, without being apprehended of him, is a fruitless labour, the reward of which is, at most, only a strait-jacket. Even as a plant does not incline towards the light, until magically affected by the light, so an individual comes in reality to Christ only when Christ has previously operated miraculously upon him. The Lord must make the commencement, not thou. The connexion between the needle and the magnet points out to thee the mystery of real conversion. His call to awake out of sleep must rouse thee; his drawing attract thee, and cause thee to hasten to him. When he has once connected himself with thee, as he did with Saul, when he laid hold of him on the road to Damascus; and as with the woman of Samaria, when he led her before the mirror of truth; and with Matthew, when he threw his command to follow him into his soul, which burned like a fire, and impelled like the wings of the storm; then that which takes place between him and thee is of the proper kind; thy turning to him is

no longer a laborious effort, but a powerful attraction, and an irresistible feeling of necessity. Thou sufferest violence. Another spirit comes upon thee, overpowers thee, and takes possession of thee. Such was the case with Naaman. You see in him a convert, not by his own will, but by that of God. He is the Lord's captive; and yet, just because he is so, a free and princely individual, who no longer wears the command to live to the Lord as a chain, but as a garland and a crown. Though the Lord were to slay him, he would never depart from him. His bias towards him is the involuntary tendency of the sunflower towards the orb of day. Like the mountain torrent, which, on its precipitous path to the sea, suffers nothing to restrain it; so all that is within him tends, on the fiery wings of love, towards his Saviour; and it seems to him, not a yoke, but a happiness and an honour to present to the Lord whatever he has, or the world affords him, as incense and a burnt offering.

II.

Naaman's inward decision manifested itself in his beautiful confession. "Thy servant," said he to Elisha, "will henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord." This is his oath of allegiance; this his signature to the act of the covenant which God has established with him. He calls himself Elisha's servant. He beholds in him the interpreter, representative, and favourite Deity; and this is a dignity which seems to him superior to the glory of kings and the grandeur of princes. In this respect, another criterion has been put into his hands than that by which he was formerly wont to measure human greatness. He no longer looks at the outward appearance, but learns to judge spiritually.

"Thy servant," says he, and calls himself by this appellation in the sincerity of his heart. Veneration, love, and fervent humility, put the words into his mouth. It is a question whether his attendants understand how to appreciate such condescension of their master; but Naaman cannot trouble himself on that account. Delivered from the deceitfulness of worldly etiquette, he feels in that elevated state of mind which David experienced before the ark. A scornful Michal would also have heard from his lips the reply, "I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight, whilst of the despised in the land, I shall be had in honour."

"Thy servant," says the Syrian, "will henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord." He *will* no longer do so. His resolution is taken. This decision of the will is a Divine act, as is always the will which "God worketh." This never changes, but is permanent as the Spirit that produced it, and constitutes the man. Naaman will henceforth offer no more sacrifices to idols; but if he did it again, and even repeated it, yet it would not be he who did it. His inmost and real self would no longer participate in the deed. The Divine will in the Christian, is the Christian; and thus the Christian sins no more, and cannot sin; whilst he who is not a Christian can do nothing else but sin. In every regenerate individual, we find the Christian and no-Christian together in one person. A regenerate man is the most mysterious phenomenon under heaven. He has every hour to do with another, who is at the same time himself, and yet not himself. He attacks him, and is able to rejoice in the wounds he receives, although the man feels them himself. He nails him to the cross, and is himself convulsed upon the cross, and yet at the same

moment stands again at the foot of it, and triumphs over a crucified adversary.

Naaman *will* no longer. This will is a Divine compulsion in the form of personal liberty. All conversion is nothing else. "Are, therefore, all converted persons mere machines?" "Would it be a misfortune, I ask, with a talented individual, to be a machine of the Holy Spirit? What is the natural man; is he free? The blinded mortal thinks he is so, and yet how is he fettered! He sins—not indeed by compulsion, but of necessity; even as the Christian is of necessity holy, although willingly so. Liberty, in the vulgar acceptance of the term, is once for all a lost blessing. But if we must at all events be subject to some power or other, who would not rather be impelled by the powers of heaven, than be sold under the dominion of darkness? A third does not exist."

"Thy servant *will*." Such a decision of the will takes place in all whom God rescues. It is the signal of true conversion. Where it has not been uttered, the great turning-point has not arrived. There are also probably many individuals amongst us, who go so far as to say, "I should like to devote myself to the Lord." "I am inclined to do so." "I gladly would." But this is not sufficient. Such an impotent inclination does not preserve the individual from hell. Thousands continue with it all their life long in the power of Satan. The sentiment, "I should be glad," must be changed into an "I will!" into a resolute, joyfully confident, and energetically pervading "I will! I will!" and then a dot behind. "My family shake their heads at it; but I *will* belong to the Lord Jesus. My friends advise me against it; but I *will*. What can my friends offer me? The world threatens me with ridicule and reproach. World, begone! I *will*! in spite of thee.

It will cause a sensation if I suddenly forsake the stage of the world, and its vanities, and join the camp of Israel; but be it so! I will return to the Lord. I *will*, though all the host of Satan should oppose my purpose, and though I should be trodden under foot in the streets; yet nevertheless, I *will*! Away, ye idols, whom I have hitherto served! Ye vain circles, in which I have moved too long, farewell! Ye follies, in which I have wasted my time, I execrate you! I swear to the Lord my God, that I will keep the statutes of his covenant, and by this determination, I will abide." Such a resolute will as this must be begotten and brought forth in our souls; a resolution like the abutment of a bridge, against which every wave of objection and opposition dashes in vain; a resolution like a piercing sword, which cuts its way, right and left, and breaks with everything which cannot consist with Christ; a resolution, the powerful tone of which is heard far round the vicinity in which we live, and which impresses upon our whole life and conduct the stamp of its decisiveness. As long as this resolution does not exist in our souls, our life of faith is a nonentity, and our religion is a mere semblance, delusion, and deceit. For religion does not consist in mere knowledge, sight, and feeling; but in the will. Observe this the more carefully, since from an unhappy confusion of ideas upon this point, the most painful results may ensue.

Naaman resolves henceforth to offer no more sacrifices to his idols, but to the Lord. We congratulate him on this sacred and salutary determination. O, that it lay in our power to prepare the way for it in your hearts likewise! When did ever an age deserve the epithet of idolatrous, like the agitated period in which we live? There are three idols in particular, which hold the world captive

in their ever widening magic circles. **WORLDLY ENJOYMENT** is the name of the first ; clothed in the party-coloured enchanting attire of classical beauty, it exercises a magical influence over all ranks and ages. Millions offer up to it the last serious thought, and even the desire for immortality. Some sensual gratification for the coming hour, a new one for the following, and so on, is all that their refined materialism desires and claims. The second is called **POLITICAL FREEDOM**. It is with respect to the hopes of the world in the present day, the millenium. This idol swallows up, by thousands, every more essential consideration ; leads, with its deceitful glimmer, the multitude ever further away from that which is needful ; and represents to them the salvation of the world as consisting in institutions, which the decision of history has long ago pronounced vain, and which it has designated as cisterns that can hold no water. The third idol, before whom we behold this deluded age bowing the knee, is the **UNSANCTIFIED SUPERIORITY OF THE HUMAN MIND**, genius, brilliant wit, and the creative power of thought, to which ever of the infernal potentates it may be found ministering. The admiration of some brilliantly gifted poet or philosopher has exalted itself almost to a religious worship. The being in bondage to the spirit of another, for instance that of Goëthe or of Hegel, is undisguisedly celebrated as the culminating point, and the highest aim of all mental culture. Literary heroes such as these, are worshipped in conscious or unconscious Pantheism, nor is the open confession of it shunned. Where such talents develop themselves, people speak of manifestations of the Deity in the human mind, the contemplation of which ought to be accompanied with devotional feelings. A step further, and the abominations of the antichristian period will present

themselves in their complete development. May the Lord look with compassion upon this state of things, and dissolve the charm, wherever it has found its way into our midst, and preserve our feet from the snares of Satan! May Naaman's motto rescue us from destruction! "Not other gods, but the Lord alone."

III.

Naaman joins with his cheerful confession, a peculiar request. After Elisha had refused the gift which his love impelled him to offer, the Syrian requests a present from him, and says, "Shall there not, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord." This request of the grateful Syrian, may appear strange, and leads us to suspect the Christianity of his sentiments. But let us not pass an unchristian sentence, nor express an apparently superficial opinion. Naaman requests Israelitish earth, material earth, which however becomes spiritual to him. He is desirous of transporting some sacks full of it to Damascus. For what purpose? He himself intimates it. As soon as he is returned home, every mark of his former delusion shall be banished from his vicinity. No idolatrous image, no heathen symbol, shall any longer find a place under his roof; on the contrary, an altar to the living God shall elevate itself in his house, to give testimony to all of the great grace bestowed upon him. He does not intend to conceal the change and transformation he has experienced. Every one shall know and see to whom he has sworn fealty. Whatever may be the result as regards himself, the altar shall give information even to his latest descendants, that Naaman became a servant of the God of Israel, and that

Jehovah is Naaman's fortress, defence, rock, and deliverer.

But this altar is not destined merely to be a memorial. Naaman intends to sacrifice upon it to the Lord, and by means of this significant symbol daily to renew the confession of his sin, as well as the expression of his ardent hope in the promised Messiah. Elisha does not forbid him from exercising these priestly functions in his own person. As an isolated man of God in a distant heathen land, Naaman was always at liberty to regard himself in a freer position with reference to the Levitical law. If he thereby anticipated the New Testament era, the Lord himself would the less object to it, the more the highly favoured man by reason of his elevated state of faith, was justified in doing so and capacitated for it. Besides this, in the person of the sacrificing heathen proselyte, a lovely omen of propitious times to come, dawned upon the earth. Its appearance fringed the black clouds of the idolatrous world with the light of a morning star, which promised blessings in abundance. It pointed prophetically to a priestly race, which rapidly overstepping the boundaries of Canaan as well as the fence of ceremonial institutions, would gradually extend its ramifications, like living veins of gold, through all nations and languages. And this prophetic prefiguration, as Elisha might easily anticipate, was *Divine intention*.

Naaman's idea of erecting an altar upon Israelitish soil, must not be narrowmindedly interpreted to the prejudice of the enraptured man. Whoever is inclined to suppose that he connected some superstitious expectation with this earth, would only thereby betray his total inability to appreciate the manifestations of more delicate mental feelings. What is a leaf from a tree on the Mount of Olives? We lately saw one, and were affected. What would be a

nosegay from the summit of mount Calvary? And yet if we possessed such a one, how wondrously would it seem to us to bloom! Thus Naaman likewise was well aware, that the soil on the banks of the Jordan, in its material qualities, possessed no preference to that near Damascus; but still it was the soil of the country, which the Lord had chosen before every other soil; upon which his footsteps were heard, in a distinguished manner; soil shone upon by the miraculous radiance of Divine glory; and soil at the same time, from the never-to-be-forgotten place where he, the happy stranger, had experienced infinite salvation, and where he had found the living God, and in him, eternal life; therefore, *holy soil*, if any were deserving of the name. Now if it seemed delightful to him to possess something of this earth in a foreign heathen land; if it filled him with sweet recollections to pray and offer sacrifice upon this soil; when he even felt, as if the walking upon that sacred ground would promote the consciousness of his fraternity with the servants of Jehovah in the distant land of Canaan, ought we pitifully to shrug up our shoulders, and ridicule it as childish weakness? O not so, my friends! Let the mind reserve its rights. We carry our treasure in earthen vessels, and cannot snatch from the angels their pure spirituality, and take it to ourselves as a prey; neither are we required to do so, but are permitted to be men, and to feel as men. The Christian religion demands not the destruction of that which is human in our natures, but merely the crucifixion of "the old man." The endeavour to tear away each and every sensibility as such, rests upon misconceived ideas of sanctification, and has never produced anything but caricatures of saints, and Pharisees.

Whilst thus beholding Naaman depart with his singular load, a variety of things occur to me, and methinks the

images accumulate whilst regarding the inconsiderable transport. The soil of Canaan carried out into the distant heathen world—what a significant hieroglyphic! On Judah's soil the salvation of nations blooms. Naaman wishes to pray upon Israelitish ground. Our altars for prayer are always well placed on the soil of Israel,—I mean on that of its promises and experience of deliverances. Naaman's altar is to be erected in the house, where a short time before such inexpressible misery met our view. The providential guidance of all the elect terminates before an altar of thanksgiving and praise. Naaman's altar will stand solitary in Damascus. Round about it all will be still Pagan, still dark. An altar consecrated to the Lord, but not seldom similarly situated, is met with in every regenerate heart. However gloomy all around it may be, however barren and frequently stormy, yet the altar stands, and a little cloud of incense in the individual's secret sighs ascends from it at all times to the Lord. O, that in all our houses such an altar stood as Naaman built—an altar, with the inscription, "Salvation is come to this house;" an altar, inscribed with the names of all who live under that roof; an altar, from which the incense of life continually rises, and to which the inmates are joyfully resolved to carry everything, which the honour of Immanuel requires! O, may the Lord erect such spiritual altars in our cottages, and soon cause the blissful moment to arrive, in which the watchword of the Syrian will be renewed a thousand-fold amongst us; "I will henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord!"

XVII.

SCRUPLES OF CONSCIENCE.

YOU know the words of John in his first Epistle i. 7, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Observe, these are the words of John, which so many of you suppose you are better able to understand than those of the writer of the epistles to the Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. But probably they may this day open a private protest against you! The world refuses to know anything of the blood of Christ. It only requires to be mentioned, and many a one makes a face as if he had heard something intolerable. Even the hateful epithet, which is wont to be applied to our Evangelical doctrine, testifies of deeply-rooted repugnance to the blood of the Lamb. Discourses and hymns which treat of that blood, are rejected with irritated feelings, as the productions of mysticism. Thus Christ crucified is still counted as the offscouring of all things, and will continue to be so, till the last despiser of his blood walks the path of destruction. For assuredly, he who cannot endure his blood is accursed. "The preaching of the cross," says the Apostle, "is foolishness unto them that perish." Thousands again, in the present day, profess a certain kind of religion, but the blood is wanting in it. This deficiency is a sufficient testimony that theirs is a false religion, and that, minutely inspected, it is only enmity against Christ. "But," say you, "I believe in the Divine dignity of Christ; I believe in his supernatural mission; I believe in the reality of his miracles." And yet all this does not constitute you Christians. The delight in and the love for his blood, is one of the primary

and most essential features in the physiognomy of a true disciple of Jesus, and where this feature is wanting, whatever will may be there. We may have an individual before us in Christian attire; but the man himself is no Christian.

The blood of the Lamb is the central point of the whole of the Christian religion. It is in this blood, that the temple of the New Testament is founded. Take away the blood, and such a temple no longer exists. Deny its power, and you deny the whole of salvation by Christ. Say, what colour is it, which shines the brightest through the whole of Scripture? In what colour did the first promise glitter, with which God rejected the first sinners in paradise? In what colour did Abel wait upon the Lord, when he brought him the acceptable sacrifice? What colour is the predominating one, in which God brings forth significant types to view, and makes sublime preparation? What colour rescued the children of Israel in Egypt from the murderous sword of the destroying angel? In what colour did the Lord clothe the emblematical figures and ceremonies of the tabernacle? In what colour glittered, in sacred days, the ark it contained and the altars? In what colour did the people, bending in the dust, listen to the absolution of the high priest? What colour was borne by almost all the predictions of the holy seers concerning him who was to come? In what colour swims the Gospel of the Old Testament—the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah? And tell me with what colour is the New Testament imbued? What colour did the apostles choose for their uniform and their favourite badge? What colour gleamed upon the standards which they carried amongst the heathen? And even those with the palm-branches before the throne of the Lamb, in what colour did they wash their clothes? Do you know?

O how can you be ignorant of it ! It is the colour which is still the most beneficial to the eye of the humbled sinner, the most consolatory and the dearest to his heart. Not white, nor blue, nor green—although even these possess a pleasing signification,—but *red* is the colour. It is the colour of blood.

O what a song of praise pervades the world to the blood of the Lamb ! What a song of praise from the beginning to this hour ! For the space of four thousand years, it rushed along in the tone of *desire*. During the last two thousand years, it resounds its notes of joy. At one time it is the exulting hymn of rescued sinners, who at the sight of the blood, were divested of all their troubles. At another it is the sorely-pressed warrior's song of hope, who looking up from the surrounding darkness to the blood, no longer any doubts of a successful result. It is again the song of peace of the bitterly assaulted, who under the buffetings of a messenger of Satan at their side, suddenly find in the blood the most complete alleviation for their hearts. It is also the triumphant song of the departing righteous, who behold death, sin, hell, and Satan, lying vanquished at their feet ; because they know that the threshold of their hearts is reddened with that blood. At another time it is a festive hymn of wearied and sorely tormented souls, who after long fatigue, find a resting-place in this blood. Many things in the world may be praised more loudly and pompously than this blood, but nothing was ever yet praised more ardently, profoundly, or with more blissful hearts, than the blood of the Lamb.

I have no need to tell you what the Scriptures understand by the blood of Christ. They understand by it his blood-shedding ; Christ's sufferings and death, so far as they were mediatorial ; his enduring the punishment in our stead ; his bleeding sacrifice, by which he satisfied, for

us, the righteousness of the Divine Judge. And certainly, salvation is contained in it, and the life of the poor sinner flows out of it. Let him dye his banner red; his cockade be red, and red the feather in his hat. For the document of his nobility and his passport are red, and whatever he is that is great, he is so in the blood.

But how is it with the efficacy of this blood? Our relation with reference to it decides our eternal fate. Having an interest in this blood, or having none, implies being either eternally saved, or eternally lost. What does John say? "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanseth us from all sin." Does he say, "*helps* us to make us clean?" No, it cleanses us. "Encourages us to cleanse ourselves?" No, the blood itself cleanses us. "Cleanses us from delighting in sin?" Not so, but the blood cleanses us from sin itself. "Yes, from the sin of spiritual drowsiness and slothfulness!" No, only use your eyes: "from all sin." "The blood?" Yes, the blood. You would gladly think that Christ's example makes us clean. Look, the apostle John is of a different opinion. You preach that Christ's doctrine accomplishes it. It is his blood which does it, says John. You say, "The imitation of Christ?" No, his blood, his blood. "The zeal for amendment," say you, "according to the precept and example of Christ." O how little savour have you yet of the true nature of the Christian religion! But John himself also says, "that the Spirit purifies from sin!" Yes, but that is quite another affair. That is not the question here; here the question is concerning the blood; and it is to this blood, you all must confess, whether believers or unbelievers, whether you are sprinkled with this blood, or trample it under foot—it is to the blood that the power is here unequivocally ascribed to cleanse, and that entirely and from all sin.

Cleanses from all sin! It is impossible to express how

this sounds in the ears of him who has recognized in the true light what sin is, and that he is a sinner. With what a craving appetite does he fall upon such a passage, like a panting hart rushes to a bubbling spring, and like a famished sheep, which finds in a sandy desert a verdant pasture; no one can imagine it who has not been himself in the situation of the panting hart and the famished sheep when finding water and pasture. Many amongst you, probably, read the words, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin;" but what have they from them but the mere dead letter? Such passages shine first in the dark; but then they are stars, festival-tapers, lamps which point out the home of peace.

But how is it to be understood that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin? Simply, according to the obvious sense, and as a child would understand the passage. He for whom the blood of the Lord flowed, is accounted sinless before God. His sins are no longer imputed to him, because they have received in Christ the reward of justice. See, my friends, here is the point, in reference to which many of our hearers are not satisfied with us. According to their wish, we ought not to say so much concerning the power of the blood of Christ. Here, say they, we ought to walk softly, that is, detract from the Gospel; here we ought not to use such strong expressions as we are wont to do; that is, obscure the brightness of the Christian religion where it shines the most brilliantly. Here it is desired that we replace the consolations of the Gospel with a variety of conditions and objections; but this would be to degrade and curtail the merits of the Surety. Here, for instance, we ought to preach that the blood of the Lamb absolves us from those sins of which the individual has previously obtained the mastery, so that

they no longer live in him—that is, we ought to turn our backs upon Christ, and his mediatorial work. What strange ideas are these! No, my friends, though we might never become true friends with each other during the whole of our lives, and though you were to continue to go about as long as a breath is left in you, with the Pharisaic complaint, “The man goes too far;” and though your displeasure against us were, in the end, to vent itself in burning rage; nay, even if the children of the devil, who make this great and sacred matter a covering for their wickedness, were to spring up amongst us like mushrooms, since some such characters are already to be met with, yet in this affair we cannot accede to your wishes. We *cannot*. No, never. We shall continue to trumpet forth in the most powerful manner, the efficacy of the blood of Christ; and even though we might occasionally duly succeed in doing so, yet we should always bear about the feeling with us, that we had spoken much too poorly and faintly on the subject. It remains true that there is no condemnation for those for whom the blood of the Lamb was shed, as Paul says. Such a one, as the Lord himself testifies, is clean throughout. His life lies in the sight of God, in the lustre of the most perfect blamelessness and beauty in whatever disguise, covering, and even leprous scales, it may still appear in the eyes of men. And has the blood of Christ such efficacy? Most assuredly. The dying thief ascends from the elevation of his well-deserved gibbet, immediately into the triumphal car of the King of kings, because he experiences the efficacy of that blood. Mary Magdalen, whose company was shunned by decent people, and that justly, because that blood was shed on the cross for her, stands more unblameable before God, than those moral people who condemn her, and that with reason.

“But this is horrible!” Horrible? No, it is sweet and precious above every thing. “But then every one may say, ‘O, the blood of Christ has atoned for everything!’” Every one? No, You are under a mistake. He that is still in alliance with sin, cannot say so, and if he does, the devil has blinded him. He who does not find within him the law of the Spirit warring against the law in his members, has no claim to the consolation; and if he improperly applies it to himself, he makes himself worthy of two-fold damnation. Those for whom Christ shed his blood, receive Christ’s Spirit also, in order that they may separate themselves, by a sacred protest, from the sin that is within them, and that they may acquire a relish for God, and the things of God, and may anathematize and execrate from the bottom of their souls, everything that appertains to the kingdom of darkness. The dominion of sin over them is at an end, and whenever it may seem to reign over them, it only reigns like a hated robber, who takes them, by surprise, and not like a legitimate and voluntarily chosen prince, to whom they willingly and lovingly devote themselves. Their prince is Christ; him they are resolved to serve. Sin is a marauder, a foreign oppressor, against whom they would gladly elevate walls and barriers. Such are the people for whom the consolation of the blood of Christ is intended. They are no saints in themselves, but continue sinners in their own esteem; they are, however, real lovers of the saints, and protestants, in thought and deed, against the devil and all his filthiness.

Now these people trust that they are clean in the sight of God, and that justly. But must not, from such a consciousness, a carnal carelessness necessarily arise? On the contrary, my friends. This blood likewise cleanses the heart, and purifies the conscience. If anything that is

sinful again presents itself, either in their hearts or lives, do you imagine that they only quickly say to themselves, "O, the blood of Christ has atoned also for this!" Such is not the case. Sin does not suffer itself to be expunged from the conscience by such a mere thought. The Spirit of truth, which is in the people does not admit of it. It can only be accomplished by the blood of Christ, not by means of an operation of the memory, but by being apprehended in living faith. This faith, however, is not always at our command, and thus, even in the case of a converted person, a renewed act of unfaithfulness may be succeeded by conflicts of which the world has no idea. He to whom great faith is given also possesses much peace. He who is always able immediately to lay hold on the blood of the Lamb, goes on his way in uninterrupted tranquillity, and is fully justified in doing so; for whether we believe it or forget it, the blood of Christ has, once for all, blotted out our sins; and the more confidently the individual is able to believe this, the less need has he to be anxious about his sanctification.

I thought it advisable to express myself, for once, more fully upon this important subject, and rejoice in having found the opportunity for it in that part of the narrative which presents itself to us for our meditation on this occasion. At least our text will not appear as a deviation from this lengthy introduction, since the latter finds its confirmation in the former, and the former its explanation in the latter.

2 KINGS v. 18, 19.

"In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on

my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon : when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.

“And he said unto him, Go in peace. So he departed from him a little way.”

A circumstance presents itself to us to-day, which threatens to trouble the extremely pleasing impression made upon us by the remarkable change in Naaman's soul, in the degree that it appears impossible to make it harmonize with the man's inward state, as far as we have become acquainted with it ; and a circumstance which has been already a snare and a stumbling-stone to many, in consequence of an abuse of its application ; and hence in requires the more serious investigation, which we are therefore desirous of undertaking on the present occasion. A three-fold object demands our attention : first, **DEFENCE** ; secondly, **EXPLANATION** ; thirdly, **APPLICATION**.

I.

It is unquestionably an extremely striking circumstance to which our meditation is now directed ; a circumstance which, to our no small astonishment, seems suddenly to place the sentiments, not only of Naaman, but the prophet also, in an equivocal light, and to cast a most grievous suspicion upon them. To hear from the lips of a man who has just sworn allegiance, with the most cheerful resolution, to the living God, a moment afterwards express the wish, that the Lord would pardon him, if, after his return to Damascus, he should accompany his prince, as before, into the temple of the idol Rimmon, in order to bow his knee with the former before the altar of this heathen deity, this is beyond measure surprising. And how does Elisha

act with reference to such an offensive request? We should suppose he would protest most energetically against such mean-spirited and half-hearted reservations. However, he not only enters into Naaman's request, but also promises to grant it. What shall we say to this? Is it any wonder, that from time immemorial, scarcely any passage in the Word of God has so embarrassed the heads and pens of commentators as this? Can it appear strange to any one, that, even down to the most recent periods, thousands imagined that they had found in this affair a plaster for certain gangrenes and wounds of an injured conscience, that was infinitely more welcome to them than the remedy of the blood of Christ, which is able thoroughly to remove and eradicate the evil? Naaman was exalted, as it were, to be the patron of spiritual irresolution, half-heartedness, timidity, insincerity, and indecision; and the prophet Elisha was regarded as the sealer, defender, and protector of this despicable state. The conduct of these two furnished the fig-leaves, behind which they sought to conceal the shame of their nakedness from themselves and from God. Coquetting with the world under certain conditions, was not forbidden, because Naaman practised it, and the prophet assented to it in the name of God.

We must, however, most solemnly protest against such a view of the circumstance recorded in our text, as incorrect and false. The most revolting injustice is done by it to the two individuals. It is not a mere superficial and spiritless apprehension of the subject, but a malicious misinterpretation of their conduct. We therefore most cheerfully undertake the defence of these calumniated individuals, and thus fulfil the first duty to which we feel ourselves called.

What ought we to think of the sentiments of those who,

to justify themselves, interpret a passage like that before us, in the manner just mentioned? This is the first point which requires explanation. The inmost soul of these people may be exposed to view in a good measure by the following disclosures: "I desire to be a Christian, for I wish at length to go to heaven, and none but true Christians, as I have always heard and believe, can do so. The kingdom of God, however, does not come with observation. It is the will of God that I should serve him in spirit and in truth. Hence, what you are wont to call a public standing-forth under the banner of Christ, is not indispensably necessary. It is not requisite that I trouble those around me with the loud declaration, that I am resolved to yield myself up to Christ, and exhibit, in pompous array, my inward decision by outward separations. Why do you require me also to separate myself externally from the world and its ways, so far as they are not openly sinful? I worship the Lord in the temple of my heart. Why do you enjoin me openly and boldly to cleave to the children of God and their ways? I build an altar to the Eternal in secret. Why do you make it obligatory upon me to renounce this and that particular connexion, company, occupation, amusement, and social pleasure, in the enjoyment of which I can, nevertheless, always preserve my religion, and worship God in secret?" Of such a nature are the ideas of these people, and they really act according to these principles. They wish to be Christians, but are unwilling, on that account, to forsake the world, to which they are conformed in numberless respects, ay, and with which they live, as before, in a secret understanding. They bend the knee to God, where no sacrifice is required; and the next moment they do homage to idols. Their predominant inclination leads them to that

which is of the flesh, and only considerate reflection to that which is of God. And with these half measures and this hypocritical deportment, they still assert that they are standing on scriptural ground. They say, "We tread in the footsteps of Naaman, and have Elisha's sanction for our conduct!" Is it possible to hear such language without indignation? What therefore do they make of the two men of God? They stamp Naaman as a false brother, who is not sincere in his confession of faith; who has only pretended to renounce the service of the devil; who, at his conversion, had by no means given up the intention to sin, but was merely desirous of finding a way, in which he might quietly continue his former mode of life; and they brand Elisha as a false prophet, who pronounces a benediction upon an intentional denial of Jehovah; who, in the most obvious contradiction to his great predecessor, the Tishbite, sanctions a halting between two opinions, and makes concessions which are worthy only of an emissary of hell. But I should like to ask those people, on their conscience, whether they are really convinced, that the example to which they appeal sanctions their religious insincerity and dissimulation? It is my opinion that such people are not simply mistaken, but are also malicious characters and rogues. I think they belie themselves, contrary to their better knowledge, by attributing to the expression of the Syrian and the answer of the prophet, such a worthless meaning, and doubt not, that if they could consent to disclose the inmost recesses of their hearts, my supposition would be only too well founded. It must irresistibly impress itself upon their own feelings, that a man, like our converted foreigner, could not have felt inclined to turn again to his country's idols; and still more unequivocally must their conscience testify to them,

that a man of God, like Elisha, could not possibly be misled to such a decision as that attributed to him, which is diametrically opposed to the declarations of the Divine word. For the Bible leaves no one in doubt how the living God desires to be honoured. He wishes to have the whole heart; those who are neither cold nor hot, he spues out of his mouth. "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God," it is said, "and him only shalt thou serve." "If Jehovah be God, serve him; if Baal, serve him!" "He that is not with me, is against me; he that gathereth not with me scattereth." "He that saith to his father and to his mother, I have not seen him, nor acknowledges his brethren, nor knows his own children, but observes thy word, and keeps thy covenant, they shall teach Jacob thy judgment and Israel thy law; they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar." The Lord seeks worshippers, who not only swear allegiance to him with the heart, but loudly in word and deed, from the impulse of their hearts. "If thou confess with thy mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." "Whosoever confesseth me before men, him will I also confess before my heavenly Father; but whoso denieth me before men, him will I also deny." The Lord requires that our whole deportment should exhibit us as those who are no longer of the world, but are essentially different from the children of the world. "Be not conformed to this world," is his injunction by the mouth of the Apostle. Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agree-

ment hath the temple of God with idols? Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you." It is the Lord's will, that we should sooner forsake every thing, than deny the faith and the truth of the Gospel. "He that is ashamed of me and my words before this wicked and adulterous generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he shall come in the glory of his Father, with his holy angels." "He that hateth not father, and mother, and brother, and sister, for my sake, is not worthy of me. But he that forsaketh all for my sake, shall receive it again an hundred-fold."

The Lord is so little satisfied with what is called honouring him in secret only, that he denounces a woe upon those whom all men speak well of. He expects, at the same time, from his disciples, that they place themselves so openly under the standard of his kingdom, as to make it impossible for them to escape the reproach and ridicule of the world, on account of their profession. Hence Paul admonishes all Christians, saying, "Let us go forth, therefore, unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach." Therefore the description of worshippers, who correspond with the Lord's requirements, is clearly obvious, and has been so in every age. He wishes to see those about him, who are entirely his; sincere, and decided characters, who, in consequence of their inward dissimilarity, separate themselves outwardly from the multitude; joyful confessors of his name; despisers of the glory of this world for his sake; persons who protest in word and deed against the world's follies and vanities; and such as retire from the stage where the blind follow their pursuits. And shall Elisha have informed Naaman, that he need not be such a one, but that, as a favour, he is at liberty to divide his heart

between the service of God and Belial? Can such an opinion actually be seriously formed by any one? I am compelled to doubt it very much. Every one has probably so much sense of truth, as suffices to repel such a lying interpretation. But if I am mistaken, and thou art really of opinion that in the circumstance related in our text, thou hast found an excuse for thy irresolution and hypocrisy, take to heart the following points:—

Thou wouldst gladly believe that the Syrian's heart still cleaved in a measure to his idols, and that Elisha did not impute this to him as a sin. But to thy confusion, listen to Naaman's confession: "I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel; thy servant will therefore henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord." Thou persuadest thyself, that Naaman was desirous of concealing his faith from the world; but dost thou not hear, that he utters this confession in the face of his whole retinue, and the latter could therefore spread his declarations further. Thou consolest thyself that Naaman was unwilling to separate himself outwardly at Damascus from his countrymen; and that the prophet authorized him to do so; but consider, on the contrary, that he resolutely determines to appear outwardly what he really is inwardly; for to this end he intends to erect an altar to Jehovah at Damascus, and studiously place it before the eyes of the world, as the token of his conversion. Thou soothest thy conscience with the idea that Naaman, in order not to offend the world, had the intention of withdrawing himself as far as possible from the fellowship and walk of other servants of God; but reflect that this so little occurs to him, that on the contrary, he seeks, by the sensible medium of the Israelitish soil, which he is transporting to Syria, to be able to

maintain, even outwardly, and I might almost say in a constrained manner, communion with the saints of Israel. Thou imaginest to thyself, that Naaman was unwilling to forsake his former sinful way, at least in one particular or other; but canst thou suppose that in this case he would have disclosed it to Elisha, from whom he could expect nothing but the most decided disapproval of his purpose? Thou thinkest that Naaman felt assured that he could quietly pursue many things, although condemned by his conscience, beneath the protection of God's forgiving grace; but how greatly is thy malicious view of the subject put to shame, and exposed as fallacious and unfounded, by the whole of his manner, which breathes nothing but sincerity, and indicates anxious scruples of conscience, in which he yields the matter up to the decision of the prophet. It is, therefore, tangibly evident, how greatly those mistake, who think they find in this expression of Naaman's, an echo to their insincerity, and in the sanction of the prophet, an ægis for every irresolution and secret indecision in the jurisdiction of religion. They ought, on the contrary, to feel deeply ashamed and condemned by the example of these two individuals. Naaman's sincerity reproves their dissimulation; Elisha's free and impartial view of the case, their falsifying and perverting subtlety.

II.

But what did Naaman intend by such a request? What was it he desired? Let us endeavour to understand the object he had in view. Filled with exuberant joy, he had just devoted himself without reserve to the living God, when his thoughts turned involuntarily to the view of his future life, and a scruple arose in his soul, the disturbing

influence of which was only in some measure alleviated by the circumstance that he was still able to ask advice and counsel of the man of God upon the subject.

"I am now," thinks Naaman, "about to return to Damascus. My master will not remove me from my official situation on account of my new confession. But this situation brings with it the necessity for my accompanying the king, on festive occasions, into the temple of Rimmon, and lending him my hand when he prostrates himself before the idol, and when he rises up again. I have for ever renounced idolatry and its gloomy worship. Now what have I to do in future? Shall I refuse to accompany the king? Nothing is then more certain, than that I shall lose my post, and with it my influence upon Benhadad and the people. Shall I undertake the office in future? If so, how will it agree with the profession of a servant of Jehovah? Shall I not thereby sin against him and his word? Shall I not, by so doing, incur the charge of denying his holy name?"

Such are the ideas which pervade the heart of Naaman, and cause him no little disturbance. He desires to be entirely the Lord's, and is firm in this resolution. He wishes to serve him wholly, and keep his statutes in every respect. But he is ignorant, whether, on such an occasion, he is permitted to minister to the king or not. If he should sin by so doing, O, he would sooner a thousand times hazard favour, office, influence, and even life itself, than assist in future at such a ceremony. But it is still a question with him, whether he would be committing sin in so doing. This point he would gladly see cleared up. He therefore proposes it to the prophet, confides his conscientious scruples to his decision, and says, whilst betraying the uncertainty and perplexity of his anxious mind, in the broken

and stammering words, "In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon, to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing."

Certainly these are singular words. Naaman does not put a direct question, but only expresses the wish, that God would be gracious to him in the affair; as though, notwithstanding, the Spirit testified to him that, in such an idolatrous act, a worshipper of Jehovah, even when he only outwardly participates in it, is not in his proper place; and this Naaman certainly felt, but he was desirous of ascertaining whether this might not be one of the few cases which, if exposed to the severest scrutiny, were better laid aside entirely, but which might, nevertheless, be continued under Divine forbearance. It was this he wished to ascertain, and Elisha was to decide the point.

What reply does Elisha make? The prophet does not mistake the language of his candour and sincerity. Had he had any reason to suspect the sincerity and integrity of his sentiments, he would certainly not have spared him, but have answered, "Thou must by no means enter any more into the house of the idol." But he knows that the man is in earnest to live to the glory of God, in every respect. He does not intend to serve the God of Israel in private, but before others, in his native land. Hence the question with him is not whether he may participate in the idolatrous worship, but only in the performance of a civil office, which the people will not regard as anything else. Naaman does not desire either to sacrifice or minister to idols, but to make himself the more unequivocally known, by the whole of his deportment, as a servant of Jehovah,

the more this accompanying his master to the idol temple was liable to be misconstrued. Elisha is aware of this, and therefore he replies in such a manner, desirous himself to see the honest and conscientious man retained in his influential official station; hence he bids him "Go in peace;" and thus quickly terminates the disturbance which agitates his heart.

"What! Does Elisha permit him to attend an idol temple?" Elisha has nothing against it. "But by so doing, does he not sanction an evident sin?" God forbid! The entering into an idol temple is in itself not sinful. I can imagine to myself, for instance, a diseased heathen, saying to a Christian missionary, "Accompany me into the house of my idol, that I may pray before his image. If he will not answer me, I will believe that yours is the true God, and that the idol is nothing." The missionary conducts the heathen to the spot, whilst the latter leans upon his shoulder; and in order to assist him in rising, the missionary is obliged to kneel down beside him. What think you? Would the missionary sin in so doing? Who would venture to assert such a thing? In this case the outward act is a matter of indifference, and only becomes sinful by the sinful sentiment which may be connected with it, or the offence which may be caused by it.

But would it not have been much more delightful, if Naaman had resolved to give up all fellowship, even of an outward nature, with idolatrous worship, at any price? That this would have *seemed* more pleasing, I will not deny. But whether it deserved the eulogium of greater wisdom and self-denial, is another question. That which presents the most brilliant appearance, does not always prove of the greatest importance in the balances of the sanctuary. A superficial enthusiastic feeling not unfre-

quently performs more splendid works than a deeply-rooted faith, which has been tried by fire.

“But does it not seem as if Naaman himself felt conscious that the official functions in question, did not altogether agree with his new state.” Certainly it has that appearance; for he intreats the Lord to pardon him, in case he sinned by so doing. “Therefore it is still a disposition to sin at the expense of grace?” By no means. It would be so if his conscience testified to him, that the action in dispute was absolutely sinful. But his conscience by no means tells him so. “Yet still a feeling gives him to know that it would be better to retire completely from the scene of those idolatrous abominations?” This I am willing to grant. “And yet Elisha desires to deprive him of this feeling?” Pray tell me from whence do you infer that? observe attentively Elisha’s words. He does not say, “Thou art only troubling thyself with groundless scruples.” Nor does he say in a positive manner, “It is permitted thee to prostrate thyself before the image of Rimmon.” As little does he express himself in the opposite sense. He does not feel himself called upon to impose a yoke in this instance upon the neck of the well-meaning man, nor to burden him with a variety of legal precepts, which he would after all have been obliged to derive from himself. He could have done with his proselyte whatever he pleased. Naaman would have been ready and willing to submit to everything which Elisha might have recommended, even to the giving up of his return home, and to the renunciation of all his civil dignities and privileges. But the more deeply the prophet feels this, the more carefully does he proceed with the application of his influence. He does not force himself upon the new convert with harsh requirements, nor does he exalt himself as “Lord over his

faith." He does not act as one that is in bondage to the letter, nor as a narrow minded formalist and disciplinarian. He takes a delicate and circumspective view of the particular situation of the man, and instead of cutting asunder the knot, as we should probably have done, with the sword of some section beyond the moral system or by self-made devotional rules, he unites it in the unconstrained judgment of the Spirit, with true sacred liberality. Placing himself entirely in the peculiar situation, position, and state of mind of the unworthy Syrian, he dismisses him with the salutation of peace, and says, "Go in peace!" I cannot decide whether he laid an emphasis on the words "in peace;" or whether he intended to say to the Syrian, "If thou canst tread that path peacefully, and without suffering the reproofs of conscience on account of it—enter upon it!" So much however is evident, that the prophet, far from giving way to any narrow-minded and mistrustful anxiety respecting the steadfastness of his proselyte, cheerfully trusts to the Lord and his Spirit, under whose guidance he is conscious Naaman stands, that He will show him the way, wherein he ought to walk, and that in his parting words, he only means to say, "Go thy way, I am not anxious respecting thee. Thou art in good hands. He that has received thee graciously, will also lead thee into all truth!"

III.

What has been premised, seems to me to be sufficient both to exculpate Naaman and the prophet from the suspicion of a sinful dissimulation and indecision, and to illustrate and explain the apparently enigmatical occurrence related in our text. The application of the subject thus explained in reference to ourselves, arises naturally from it. A few brief observations will bring it nearer to you.

First, therefore, a word to those who set themselves up as judges in our midst. Impress it upon yourselves, by that section of the narrative we have now been considering, never to pronounce judgment too soon upon an individual. It does not follow that *he* can be no Christian, respecting whom you may have once heard, that, like Naaman in the idol temple, he had let himself be seen in some particular place of worldly amusement. He might possibly have been present there with deep repugnance, and solely because his vocation obliged him, or his prince requested him to accompany him thither. In the latter case, do not say, that he ought rather to have risked his prince's favour, his influence over him, and even his whole official position and sphere of operation, than to have accompanied him to such vanities and fooleries. Such a judgment, however heroic it may seem, would nevertheless be superficial, harsh, and rude; and, to express it the most leniently, would be hasty and inconsiderate. Besides this, it might be the case, that the individual was induced to be present at such a place, only by a solitary enticement of the devil or his flesh, and in the midst of such apprehensions and reproofs of conscience, that he will scarcely long to venture again into such an unnatural element. And thus with crying injustice, you might have condemned one of the Lord's doves, because he was compelled to part with a feather under the claws of the vulture. O refrain from judging in general! Begin at least with yourselves. Ye who live so retired, often act, alas! just as improperly in your quiet circles, as others on the public stage of worldly pleasures, and the word of the Lord to the Scribes and Pharisees is not unfrequently applicable to you, "Ye tithe mint and annise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, namely, justice, mercy, and

faith. Ye strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel." What takes place frequently at your social meeting? Shall I tell you? You act as follows: Something of a religious nature is probably first the subject of discourse, in order imprimis to constitute you Christians. After you think you have sufficiently established your claim to this title, and secured yourselves against any subsequent suspicion, the boundaries of the conversation are extended, and the third chapter of James' Epistle begins to be verified, where it is said, "The tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." O my brethren, these things ought not to be! Let every one first sweep before his own door; the abundance of work this would occasion him, would then not suffer him to proceed to his neighbour's door. Do not forget him with the beam in his eye, who wished to take the mote out of his brother's eye; and remember, that he that judgeth another, shall also be judged; but he that judgeth himself shall not be judged.

My second exhortation is addressed to you, ye oppressed individuals, who either by your family connexions or your calling, are banished into circles where infidelity pursues its course with blasphemy, mockery, and ridicule, and where nothing but sin, ungodliness, and darkness manifest themselves around you. Let it have also reference to you, ye children of God, who are isolated in worldly-minded families, or in workshops, and places of labour, where you are obliged to see and hear worse things, than perhaps ever occurred in the temple of Rimmon; and yet know not how to escape from such hateful society. Yes, I deeply deplore your fate, ye poor captives! You will understand those words of your Lord, "In the world

ye shall have tribulation," but in him have peace. Your being in those infernal dens does not defile you. Protest with your words and by your example against the reprobate sentiments which are uttered around you, and then in patience possess your souls. Endure in the fiery furnace, till God prepares you an outlet. Heap coals of fire, as much as you have opportunity, on the heads of your enemies. In opposition to their blindness, let your joy increase, that by God's grace, you are of a different spirit. Console yourselves with righteous Lot—how was his soul vexed! with Joseph in Egypt, and Daniel in Babylon; and call to remembrance the prayer of your eternal High Priest, "I pray not that thou wouldst take them out of the world, but that thou wouldst keep them from the evil;" as well as the word of promise, "The Lord preserveth the soul and the way of his saints, and will deliver them out of the hand of the wicked."

Let my third exhortation be addressed to those that halt among us, to the insincere, and the half-hearted, who would also gladly be accounted Christians, but refuse to renounce the love of the world and its ways. O, you give yourselves fruitless trouble, whilst endeavouring to persuade us that your continued participation in the vain and idolatrous practices of the blinded world is only like Naaman's participation in the worship of Rimmon. I beseech you, what have you in common with Naaman? Even your outward position is not at all to be compared to his. Were you solemnly to renounce the ways of the world, you would not, by so doing, lose any salutary influence on those around you; you would only acquire it by such a line of conduct. Were you to say with firmness, "My friends, I cannot and dare not, for the sake of Jesus and his word, follow you any longer upon this or that par-

ticular path," would the royal displeasure ensue, or a dismission from an important and official sphere of action? I believe not. That which possibly might befall you, would be at most but a little contempt and an effusion of ridicule and reproach on the part of a superficial and benighted multitude. But the being reproached for the sake of Christ is one of the things which belong to the characteristics of Christ's redeemed people. He that is not marked with this sign of the Lamb, has reason to distrust the genuineness of his piety.

Such characters however are no Naamans, not merely as it respects their outward position, but their state in general. What a difference exists between you and that converted stranger! The worship of the idol Rimmon was an abomination to Naaman; but your hearts, on the contrary, still cleave to the vanities and follies of the world, and are infatuated with them. Naaman had great scruples of conscience with respect to participating further in the festivals of Rimmon, even though but in an outward manner; but you have no scruple or hesitation in pursuing your carnal practices. Your sole object is, to defend and justify them. Naaman studiously and most earnestly sought to avoid being regarded as denying Jehovah, and being still a heathen like others; you, on the contrary, do all you can to remove the suspicion from the children of this world, that you also belong to the despised little flock, and seek to be regarded by them, as those of their own stamp. Naaman was most profoundly and sincerely desirous to live in all things, so as to please the Lord; and hence he candidly laid his scruples before the man of God, that the latter might decide how he ought to act in future. You, on the contrary, are false at heart. You would gladly not hear the decision of God's word re-

specting your conduct, but are much more inclined to pervert the word, in order to excuse and palliate your half-heartedness with fallacious art. Naaman would have immediately resolved, whatever it might have cost him, never to enter the house of the idol any more, if Elisha had pointed it out to him as a sin, and as inconsistent with the profession of a servant of Jehovah. We may prove to you, on the contrary, a hundred times, in accordance with the Scriptures, that such and such things are unbecoming a Christian, and that others must be given up and avoided; yet such insincere souls as you, have no ear for it, and refuse to listen to it.

Or do we accuse you unjustly? If this be the case, prove it, and submit, in what follows, to the word of truth. You belong to societies, in which time is killed by card-playing. You inquire whether you are permitted to do so? No, we reply, with all firmness and decision; if you wish to pass for Christians, you are not at liberty to do so. How far this wretched pastime is sinful or not, need not here be even investigated. It is sufficient that it is offensive, and causes great scandal to the brethren. Even upon this ground we are authorized to make the abandonment of those circles imperative upon you. You attend balls. You ask, whether this is consistent with a profession of religion. No, we say, in the name of God, it is inconsistent with it. On this stage of vanity, intoxication of the senses, and the maddest dissipation, that man has no place, to whom the lesson is given to crucify his flesh with its affections and lusts. And such a one cannot continue there. But you are able to do so! Tell me, what must we think of you? You visit the theatre. "What," say you, "is that also prohibited a Christian?" Yes, altogether. For what are theatres, especially as they are

at present constituted, but the audience-chambers of lies, places where sin is exalted, propagators of self-deception and delusion, temples devoted to the intoxication of the senses, ambuscades of the Wicked One, strewn with the snares of temptation; where that which is holy is misrepresented or ridiculed, or at the best, profaned and degraded. Can a man be there in his place, who vitally apprehends the serious object of his existence, and has wholly given himself up to the service of Him, who says to his people, "Come out from among them, and touch no unclean thing!" You are members of clubs and societies for recreation, in which the spirit of insipidity, Materialism, and Infidelity bears the sway, if not the spirit of frivolity. "What, and are we not permitted to mingle amongst such company?" No; for these are not the places where a servant of Christ can or ought to linger. "Does religion put such restraints upon us as these?" Restraints, do you call them? Truly, a mournful symptom! "But if we go to this or that particular place, may the Lord pardon us for so doing!" No, the Lord will not pardon you for acting thus. For your mixing with the company and pursuits of the blind world, results from the pleasure you take in them, and not from necessity. It proceeds from a secret attachment to the temporal pleasures of sin, to the slighting of all those who take offence at it. Therefore depart from unrighteousness. Break, break with a deluded world and its ways! Yes, we exhort you to do so in the name of God; but you do not listen to it. What need have we of further testimony? No, you are no Naamans.

But enough of this. May God give us a sincere heart, and make us entire and decided characters, people like Moses was, who esteemed the reproach of Christ as greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; and like Paul, who

counted all things but dung, that he might win Christ, and be found in him. Away with the trifling Christianity of recent times, which tolerates everything, takes everything under its protection, and is able, under the subtle title of things which are indifferent, to reclaim the whole life of the world and the flesh, which it had apparently given up. But away also with that narrow-minded Pharisaical pietism, which, rapidly hastening past the greater matters of the law, betakes itself to the fabricating of numberless little by-laws and minute observances, and crying out, "Touch not this; taste not that!" imposes upon those who are called to liberty, a yoke which Christ never laid upon his people. "Liberty in the Holy Spirit," is the device on the coat of arms of Israel's God. Let love constrain, or else nothing. Love everywhere finds the right path. May it be the main-spring of our lives! Amen.

XVIII.

GEHAZI.

It is a mysterious event, which we see, in Matt. xxi. 19, hovering like a black thunder-cloud in the midst of the bright azure of the Gospel-sky. The Saviour is coming from Bethany, and is on his way to Jerusalem. He feels the cravings of hunger—not merely in appearance, but in reality. He was willing to be tempted in all points like as we are; and that no affliction should befall us, in which we could not have him for a companion. On the road where he is walking a number of trees are standing, but still devoid of foliage. It is early in the year. Emblems of sincerity, they present themselves to him as they are, and seem, with their naked branches, stretching towards heaven, to say, “If the first ray of the sun would but fructify us, we would gladly afford thee refreshment.” It is not these trees which the Saviour condemns. He grants success to the sincere, the ingenuous, and the faithful. Many a little shrub stands also by the way side. Fruit they cannot yet offer, but already possess tender and promising buds. These shrubs he blesses. In the germ he sees the fruit. He knows how to appreciate the green and hopeful stalk. He silently proceeds further, when at a distance, a tree presents itself to his view, which promises richly to satisfy his hunger. It is a fig-tree, one of that genus, which is considerably in advance of all the rest around it. Whilst the former are still standing bold and naked, it shows a luxuriance of foliage, and glitters in the freshness of its verdure. You are doubtless aware, that it is the nature of

the fig-tree, first to put forth its fruit, and afterwards its leaves. The thicketleaved tree, therefore, justified the conclusion, that it must conceal figs between its boughs, which are nearly ripe. The Lord also forms this natural conclusion. But what is the result? Alas! the tree in its proud and promising summer-dress, has deceived the hungering Son of God. For on separating the branches to pluck the figs, he finds indeed an abundance of leaves, but after examining the tree from the root to its summit, he can nowhere find any fruit, much less such as is eatable and ripe, notwithstanding its sunny aspect, rich soil, and the excellent care taken of it.

What was the tree? A hypocrite, a deceiver. And what art thou, who appearest here as a worshipper of God? Art thou anything better? I see indeed the luxuriant foliage, in which thou art adorned; I behold thy prostrations before the Almighty; I perceive solemnity and devotion in thy features, and hear the sounds of faith and contrition which proceed from thy lips. But how is it with the fruit beneath this outward appearance? Art thou in reality so humble, so opposed and inimical to sin, and full of hunger after God and his grace? Ah, there are not many of us, who are really so! Dissimulation reigns dreadfully among us. I should esteem it honourable, were I to hear one and another of you say, "I am still devoid of fruit, and therefore I will not have the leaves. I will not join in singing this or that particular hymn. I will refrain from such and such a pious expression and gesture." But instead of this you act the part of the saints, with those that are so and walk as whited sepulchres. And your whole deportment, conduct, and appearance, is only like the fresh verdure of the fig-tree in the Gospel. It allures the Lord to it, as if there were something to be gathered

from it; but woe unto you! He approaches, and your Divine worship is deception and a mask.

After the Lord had minutely examined the tree by the way, the appearance of which was so promising, but had found nothing, he opens his mouth, not to bless, but to utter a curse; and speaks aloud, that his disciples may hear and never forget it:—"Let no fruit grow on thee, henceforward for ever." And lo! scarcely have the words passed his lips, than they sink like a gangrene and deadly poison into the heart and root of the tree. Its luxuriant foliage begins to wither and die; and when the disciples pass by it the following day, the dried leaves fall rustling to the ground, and the tree is a heap of dead and naked boughs, through which the wind whistles—a skeleton, fit only for the fire. "And when the disciples saw it," says the sacred historian, "they marvelled," smote their hands together, and said with a horrifying presentiment of what the dead branches would whisper to them: "How soon is the fig-tree withered away!" The trees which presented themselves as they really were, and promised nothing which they did not possess, and were still waiting for the fructifying sun, stood there with swelling buds, and the spring smiled through their flourishing boughs.

"Every plant," said the Lord once, "which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up." (Matt. xv. 13.) Consolatory as these words are for those, who know that they are of the Father's planting, yet equally dreadful must they sound in the ears of those, to whom they announce a horrible fate. The plants here intended are members of the Christian Church; religious people, not reprobate characters, nor enemies to the truth, but persons of biblical knowledge and devout walk. But their whole religiousness is not the work of God, but of man;

and is either their own, or done to them by others. It is a Levite's dress, with which a Canaanite decks himself; the colour of the sanctuary with which the sinful Ethiopian, the unregenerate nature, has painted itself. Such persons insinuate themselves into the ranks of the pious, without being the subjects of Divine influence or guidance. They therefore will not remain in their place, but will eventually be carried away with the wicked. The corn-flowers with which they adorn themselves, are only weeds. The husbandman says, "I have not sown you. Why cumber ye the ground? Away into the fire!"

"What kind of a plant, am I then?" I hear some of you saying with a sigh. It is not to be wondered at, that an expression of the Lord's like this, is also able to cause the true children of God disturbance, especially those who have enjoyed a pious education, and have gradually come to Christ. But let no one give way to doubt too soon. You know that there are two kinds of plants, as regards their origin, even in the garden of nature—layers or cuttings, and such as grow from seed. The first are twigs cut off from a living tree, which when plunged into the earth, gradually send forth roots, and thus attain to an independent life and existence. The others on the contrary, shoot forth by a Divine miracle from the seed. Thus there are also two different kinds of true Christians, with respect to the manner of their having come to God. The one is like the plant which proceeds from a seed or kernel. They were suddenly snatched from their life of sin, in an obvious and wonderful manner, and without any particular preparation, and begotten to newness of life. Such was the case with the three thousand on the day of Pentecost, with Saul, and the Philippian jailor. Such individuals are not easily rendered apprehensive that the heavenly Father has not

planted them. Others, on the contrary, resemble the cuttings and layers. They appear as twigs cut off from godly parents and pious friends or teachers. By these they were imbued with religious knowledge, and led on to a devotional life. Though their Christianity may have long been only a dead formality, yet gradually and imperceptibly, under the silent influence of Divine grace, it put forth living roots. And now they are like the others, not merely separated branches, but plants of God, possessed of individual life, in the garden of the true Church, to the honour of God. Hence everything depends upon the root, the living and flourishing root, and the latter rests in the believing view, which the heart, impoverished by the consciousness of its sin and misery, fixes upon Christ, as the only ground of salvation and of hope.

We see this day, both the narrative of the fig-tree, just alluded to, as far as it is deeply emblematical, as well as the figure of the plants which are rooted up, which the Father has not planted, dreadfully realized in the life of an individual, whose spiritual exterior certainly induced us to expect something better, than that which lay concealed beneath it, as will now appear to be the case. "The eyes of the Lord are upon the faithful in the land, that they may dwell with him. He that walketh in a perfect way, shall serve him. He that worketh deceit, shall not dwell within his house. He that telleth lies shall not tarry in his sight."

2 KINGS v. 19—27.

"And when he had departed from him a little way, Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought : but, as the Lord liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him.

“So Gehazi followed after Naaman. And when Naaman saw him running after him, he lighted down from the chariot to meet him, and said, Is all well?

“And he said, All is well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from Mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments.

“And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants; and they bare them before him.

“And when he came to the tower, he took them from their hand, and bestowed them in the house: and he let the men go, and they departed.

“But he went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither.

“And he said, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants?

“The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.”

Who does not feel grieved on hearing a narrative end so harshly, the course of which had hitherto filled our hearts with nothing but sublime and sacred joy? Thus that which is the most brilliant here below, does not continue free from the contamination of sin; and that which is the most holy, commonly appears accompanied by its gloomy contrast. However, this deplorable supplement must prove serviceable to us. Above the dark substratum of Gehazi's conduct, Elisha's uprightness, as well as Naaman's purity and simplicity, manifest themselves only the more amiably and brilliantly. Hence this affair does

not obscure the narrative; on the contrary, it heightens its lustre. Let us therefore dedicate a few moments of reflection and thoughtful consideration to the mournful event, both for the purpose of deriving a warning from it, and for the examination of our own hearts. We first cast a look into GEHAZI'S HEART; next upon his IMPIOUS DEED, and lastly upon THE JUDGMENT, which was inflicted upon him. May the Lord give us the hearing ear and the candid mind!

1.

The individual with whom we have to do, is no black-guard from the street, no spiritually neglected person, nor one selected from what are called "the dregs of the people." Brought up in the schools of the prophets, he is Elisha's foster-son, servant, and companion. He would not have become so, had not something once taken place in him, which presented the appearance of an awakening to newness of life. What this was, is difficult precisely to say. At all events it was a pleasing impression, a better feeling, a hopeful excitement. Chemically analyzed, this apparent regeneration would probably have produced little more than a flickering flame of natural enthusiasm, and a youthful intoxication of feeling, as the result of the whole. And it is not unfrequently the case, that even in the present day, individuals offer themselves for the service of the cause of missions, whose flaming zeal for converting others is not discoverable at first sight to be nothing else, from the crown to the root, than a flower of the flesh. And still more frequently do we see persons enter, with undeniable warmth of feeling, into the society and manner of life of the people of God, who have never perceived their sinfulness, and consequently never experienced what it is to thirst after Divine grace.

“Is it therefore possible for the flesh to assume a promising religious appearance?” Certainly, my brethren. The natural imagination, for instance, may find food for itself in the region of Sacred History; the feelings, in the enjoyment of those manifold solemn emotions which attend a life of godliness; the understanding, in the ingenious decyphering of that which is mysterious and enigmatical in the Scriptures; and the conscience, in Pharisaic self-soothing, by means of devotional exercises. In modern times, religion is the cause of bringing honour upon its professors, at least, in many places. The return from superficial rationalism to biblical truth, is regarded as a sign of superior intellect, and one or other temporal advantage is frequently connected with it. How should it therefore be impossible for the flesh occasionally to covet the vesture of Godliness!

What it was that Gehazi sought in the peculiarities of the children of God—whether it was the mysteriousness of the quiet fraternity which attracted him—the respectability and outward appearance of the prophetic vocation which allured him—or the hope of being eventually himself irradiated by the glory of a wonder-worker, and thus of shining amongst the chief men of Israel—I know not. So much however appears certain, that the young man had not entered by the right door into the Lord’s sheep-fold, but over the wall and through the roof, and that what presented the aspect of a work of God in the ardent proselyte, was nothing else but an ebullition of natural emotions and affections.

But how came it that Elisha, out of the number of the disciples of the prophets, granted to this one the delightful privilege of attending him upon his official journeys, and of uninterruptedly enjoying his society? You inquire too much, my friends. Who is able to answer the question?

However, it is almost beyond a doubt, that Elisha cherished no small expectations with respect to the future, from this lively and variously gifted youth; although he did not take him into his immediate fellowship, because he clearly perceived the diseased spot in his character, and found it necessary to take him into his especial pastoral care and minute inspection, because of the ease by which he might be led astray. The prophet, however, probably never dreamt that he would be so bitterly deceived in the object of his fostering affection, or ever meet him upon a path like that on which we see him this day caught; and it may have been to him one of the most painful occurrences of his life. Do you still remember how we observed the young man with his master's staff in his hand, at the corpse of the son of the Shunammite? Even at that time, Gehazi no longer fully satisfied us, since it was evidently his intention to apply the miraculous power, which he believed to be contained in the staff, not to the Lord's honour and glory, but his own; however we suffered it to pass, and designated his conduct on that occasion, as childish, rather than wicked. But the event, of which we are this day witnesses, gives even that circumstance a black colouring. Alas! the poor man had been for some time in a critical state. From the very outset, he had mistaken the inscription over the portal of the kingdom of God, and found in it something very different from the words, "Whosoever forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." A carnal dream conducted him into the fellowship of the saints. The dream disappeared, and the reality did not offer him that which a self-loving imagination had so dazzlingly presented before him. He reckoned upon a variety of pleasing and splendid enjoyments, and found, in the grave and self-denying life of the retired fra-

ternity, the very reverse. Hence he stuck fast in the manner of life of the children of God, which he had adopted, as in the stock or in a prison; painfully deceived, and yet not sufficiently sincere to confess it; uncomfortably pent up in an element which was foreign to him, but too cowardly to throw aside the burdensome girdle; a hypocrite, therefore, inwardly glowing with the love of the word like a furnace; in his external appearance arrayed in all the characteristic marks of the profoundest contempt of the world; the eye of his body directed upwards towards heaven: whilst the evil eye of his heart, looked greedily askant at the fleshpots of Egypt. O that he could only have summoned up sufficient courage to show himself as he really was, and openly to confess that he regretted having entered among the brethren; that he was grieved at having bidden farewell to the world and its charms; and at having exchanged its pleasures and enjoyments for the sobriety and privations of his present condition! He would then have been willingly liberated from that confinement, which a life of godliness had become to him, and his former freedom, or rather slavery, would have been restored to him; and a great cause of offence would thus have been prevented. But instead of this, the man continued to lurk behind his barricade, continued to be a scholar of the prophet, and Elisha's attendant, in spite of his inward repugnance, and joined, as before, in all the pious exercises of "the quiet in the land," whilst in the interior of this whited sepulchre, the cancer of corruption spread only the more virulently in every direction, the more deeply it lay hidden under the specious flowery covering of a devotional life.

Ah, I fear that even amongst ourselves, there is no want of such persons as Gehazi! I could almost venture to point

with the finger at some among you as being such characters. They also once swore allegiance, as it seemed, with a kind of enthusiasm, under the banner of Christ, and in joyful excitement entered into an alliance with the children of God, and upon their mode of living, thinking, and speaking. And even to the present hour, we probably see them moving in this sphere, but in a pitiable manner, like those who have entered by mistake, and would gladly retire in the best manner they are able; who have once hastily given their word to something, and are now obliged to keep it, because by withdrawing it, they would degrade themselves in their own eyes and those of others. But retract your word, ye false brethren! You are seen through, notwithstanding. We know, without your confessing it, that in your inmost being you belong to the world, and only carry about the form of religion with you as a burdensome fetter. O, we will gladly excuse you from making pious speeches! We will joyfully grant you the dispensation from the obligation of continuing any longer in our fellowship, seeing that you only bring up an evil report of the good city of our king Jesus, and betray the sacred deposit by your works, whilst bringing your fallacious homage to it in your words and gestures. Let the past suffice. Pollute no longer the courts of the Lord. Lay aside the hypocritical mask, which is already falling to pieces. Be outwardly children of the world, even as you are inwardly. Visit balls, theatres, &c., instead of religious meetings. Instead of wearisomely continuing your intercourse with the saints of the Lord, keep company with those that are without. Say to those that laugh and jeer, "We are your associates!" Of a truth, you would thereby do us and our kingdom a great service. Your fraternity only brings unnecessary suspicion upon our sacred cause.

But now to the narrative. Naaman, as happy as a child, at the great deliverance he has experienced, has just reached his hand to the prophet on taking leave. Elisha stands inwardly moved, his heart filled with profound thankfulness to God for the grace and mercy he has manifested towards the dear stranger. The eyes even of Naaman's servants swim in tears of sacred emotion. The angels around the throne take their harps and tune them to new songs of praise. Gehazi's soul is also affected. When the sun shines from heaven, not only do the little birds ascend on high, whilst warbling their notes of joy; but even the basilisk and the adder move in the bushes. The serpent now wound itself about the heart of Gehazi. Gehazi does not rejoice. Gehazi is out of humour. Gehazi looks gloomily. O significant sign! For he who does not participate in the joy of heaven over a repenting sinner, surely does not belong to heaven, nor is he born of God. Satan does not rejoice on such an occasion. It is a grief to him. He pines with vexation. But what is it that causes Gehazi's ill humour! He is chagrined that his master is so disinterested as to decline the rich presents offered to him by the Syrian. It pains him deeply that he is compelled to give up the hope of a rich booty, which he had derived from the arrival of the illustrious stranger. Alas, how dreadful! How is the seed of corruption already matured in the man! How widely has the poisonous bud of lust already expanded within him! "Lust, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin; but sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death." We shall now witness the whole of this deplorable process take place, in the most lamentable manner, in the case of Gehazi.

Naaman proceeds joyfully upon his way; Elisha retires, with a prayerful heart, into his cottage. For a while Gehazi stands lost in thought, and the following soliloquy

takes place within him. "Behold," says he, "my master has spared Naaman, this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought." "*This* Syrian," he says. Does it not seem as if by the contemptuous appellation of the man, he sought to excuse his villainy towards him, and again lull to slumber his awakening conscience? "Naaman," he continues, "will be unable sufficiently to extol the strange magnanimity of the prophet; but what the better am I by his carrying back his gold and silver to Damascus? What should I not all at once become, if the gift my master has disdained, were to fall into my lap? I might then purchase an estate for myself, plant oliveyards and vineyards, keep sheep and oxen, and be surrounded by menservants and maidservants? Up, therefore, he is still there. Seize the favourable moment. Hasten after him, Gehazi! In this way the thing may be accomplished. As the Lord liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him!"

Thus the worthless young man mutters to himself, and the wicked resolution is taken. Observe the entire snaky fold of baseness in this resolution. He cannot conceal from himself how truly magnanimously the prophet had acted in declining the present; notwithstanding which, he daringly treads the beautiful example under foot, and can even prevail upon himself to prepare for an act of the most contrary description. It does not escape him, that by doing so, he will be inflicting a blot upon the name of his venerable master, in the eyes of the stranger from Damascus; but this by no means restrains him from lending a willing ear to the suggestions of his avarice. He clearly sees, that by such a disgraceful affair, he may cause the whole of God's people to be suspected of insincerity and carnal love of gain; but what does this trouble him? He thinks

only of himself, and the advantage he will derive from it, and is already impious and degraded enough, with truly blasphemous frivolity, to call Him to be the witness and promoter of his plan, who could only abhor and execrate it. "As the Lord liveth," says he, as it would appear, in addition to this, with a scoffing side look at Elisha, who with the same form of asseveration had declined accepting the offered present, "as the Lord liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him."

II.

No sooner said than done. Gehazi sets out, in order to overtake the Syrian cavalcade, which had already moved forwards the length of a furlong. Naaman, who accidentally looks round, observes Gehazi hastening after him, and recognizes him. He immediately orders a halt to be made, springs from his chariot, and advances to meet the hastening youth—a new proof of his veneration and gratitude towards Elisha. "What is the matter? Is all well?" says he, with some degree of apprehension, to the boy. "What is the meaning of thy hastening after us?" is what he intends to say. "Has any evil befallen thy master?" "No," replies Gehazi, with the most unsuspecting expression of countenance, "all is well;" and then comes forward with his sanctimonious lie. He says that he is sent by his master; but foreseeing that Naaman would scarcely believe that Elisha would, on second thoughts, lust after the present he had rejected, he invents, with extreme facility, a complete tale. He relates that two of the sons of the prophets had arrived from Mount Ephraim, in great poverty and distress, at the abode of the man of God; and that Elisha would gladly relieve them, but is unable to do so. He therefore applies, in full confidence, to

Naaman, and requests of him, for this purpose, a talent of silver and two changes of garments!

Who does not burn with indignation at this statement? The most shameful treason is committed against the prophet, and even against all Israel. A lump of silver is a sufficient price for the villain to bargain away the honour of Jehovah, as well as that of his children, to the heathen, and for ever to shake and put at stake the faith of the world, in the existence of real holymindedness under the sun.

Fortunately, however, he did not succeed in this respect with Naaman. The dangerous point of Gehazi's impious act broke upon the childlikeness of this individual. Naaman had acquired too high an idea of the members of the schools of the prophets, to permit him to imagine there could be any thing but the purest truth in the message which Gehazi delivered; and nothing could make him for a moment suspect the sentiments of the man of God. "The Lord preserveth the simple." Candid and unsuspecting as a child, the worthy Syrian believes every thing that the youth states to him; nay, it even causes him heart-felt pleasure to have, in this instance, an opportunity afforded him to show his feelings of gratitude to the prophet by word and deed, and to do good to the children of God. He urges the boy, who meanwhile affects modesty, and assumes a hypocritical expression of countenance, to take two talents of silver instead of one, and presents him, equally cheerfully, with the two changes of garments. But even this does not satisfy him. He sends, besides this, two of his servants to accompany Gehazi, in order to carry the money and the garments. Should we not be inclined to think that Gehazi would have sunk into the earth for shame, when contrasting his conduct with such unsuspecting innocence and simplicity? But on the con-

trary, his forehead is brass, his face harder than a flint. Rejoicing only in witnessing the success of his roguery, he hastens away with his booty, with all speed, and only reflects how he may bring his treasure to a place of security, and avoid discovery. O the wretched mortal! How much happier is the deceived to be esteemed than the deceiver; and him that is thus imposed upon than the cheat, notwithstanding his triumph? O sincerity, simplicity, and truth, ye are the fairest pearls in the attire of a Christian! O that we might be more abundantly adorned with these ornaments! But characters like Naaman become increasingly rare in the present day.

III.

How fares it with the worthless youth and his prey? Listen to the relation, my friends, and tremble. Gehazi has suffered the two servants to escort him for a while, until they arrived at the hill near the town. Gehazi then does not venture to carry his booty in this manner along the public street, but takes the bags of money with the changes of raiment, doubtless under new and lying pretences, from the Syrians, and after dismissing them with the hypocritical expression of thanks, he carries them to the cottage of a friend, who promises to take care of his treasure for him until further orders. Thus fear and care, these two accompaniments of sin, already begin to assail him. He is afraid of being caught and betrayed. The youth is not afraid of God; but the being unmasked before men would have been dreadful to him. First one thing torments him, and then another. "Suppose one of the sons of the prophets should have seen me; or the two servants have informed Naaman what I did with the present, and the latter, forming a suspicion, should come to the resolu-

tion of writing to my master respecting the circumstance!" Thus the storm-birds already begin to cry within him, and the young rogue feels heated and oppressed as before an approaching thunder-storm. But he exerts all his energies, in order to appease awakening terror, and to stop the mouth of an accusing conscience with a variety of fallacious excuses.

Gehazi hastens to Elisha with the appearance of a most easy mind. He even enters into the prophet's presence more boldly than usual, as if he would say, "I can look thee full in the face;" but this mask denies him the desired service. Elisha looks at him with a penetrating eye, and significantly inquires, "Whence comest thou Gehazi?" And this question, as some one very justly observes, ought to have been to him as the rustling of the leaves before a storm, which warns the wanderer to seek a place of refuge, where the approaching floods and tempests may be unable to overtake him. But as if his inmost being would be able to escape the spirit of prophecy, even as his timid eye now avoided that of the prophet, he boldly answers with a lie, "Thy servant went no whither." Rapidly and inevitably, however, as the lightning flashes through the darkness, and shines long enough to show the danger, but too briefly to point out the refuge, so the spirit of prophecy, to which that which is secret is unveiled, suddenly strikes him. "Went not mine heart with thee," says Elisha, "when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Was I not with thee in that moment when, unaffected by so much goodness and kindness, thou didst lie to the man, and say I sent thee—I requested silver and changes of garments!"

With these last words, Elisha completely hurled the lighted flambeau into the night of his sin, and you may

imagine the shame, the gnawing vexation, and the embarrassment and astonishment which took possession of this son of perdition, when he beheld himself thus suddenly drawn out of every hypocritical lurking-hole, and brought forth into broad day-light. There the miserable mortal stood, unmasked and unveiled, in all the shame of his nakedness, and is compelled to say, "Elisha knows all. The spirit of prophecy has showed it to him. He has heard my falsehoods and seen my deceit." Elisha's eye reached even further than this. He had looked into the youth's inmost heart, and knew also in what way he intended to expend the sinful booty. Hence he could say to him, "Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants?" Imagine what must have been the feelings of Gehazi, on hearing the profoundest secret of his soul unsealed. "Thy crime," Elisha meant to say, "is heinous. The time in which, and the circumstances under which, thou hast committed this impious act, aggravate thy guilt to the utmost." And certainly such was the case. That he could resolve upon such a piece of villany in those days of universal apostasy, when there was a more urgent necessity than ever for those who adhered to the standard of Jehovah, to seal the truth of their cause with their whole deportment; that he could act in such a manner, on an occasion, from which it might have been boldly expected that it would have excited better feelings and emotions even in the meanest soul; that he was daring enough for such a deed, in defiance of the clearest consciousness; that he thereby obscured and profaned a sacred and Divine work; caused the name of the Lord to be blasphemed amongst the heathen; hazarded, at the same time, the honour of Jehovah and his prophet; ren-

dered the lives of all the saints of God suspected, as being only one great tissue of hypocrisy ; scoffed at the Divine law as well as the spirit of prophecy ; and betrayed Israel's light and justice, priesthood and prophecy, to the risk of being regarded as nothing but foolery. All this rendered his sin exceedingly sinful, and even almost constituted it the sin against the Holy Ghost, to which no forgiveness is promised.

Elisha has already received his instructions for the young transgressor. After having set before him his flagrant delinquency, he says to him, in the name of God, "The leprosy of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and to thy seed for ever." And the words were instantly fulfilled. "And he went out from his presence," relates the sacred historian, "a leper as white as snow." It was necessary, for the honour of Jehovah, that the scabby sheep should be thus exposed and marked. It was necessary for once to present before the eyes of the world such a living memento of the abomination of hypocrisy. But besides this, the same leprosy now remained in Israel, which, as a sign and mark of the retributive justice of God, would prove a terror to hypocrites for the future ; whilst to those who were seeking salvation, it would continue as a permanent memorial of the grace and assistance of Jehovah ; for it was the leprosy of Naaman, the Syrian, who had been so wonderfully and gloriously delivered. But why this plague was inflicted, not only upon Gehazi, but also upon his descendants, is a subject respecting which any one may contend with God who feels inclined to do so. I will not. I think, that if it pleased him, he would be well able to defend himself. And if this evil was of that service to his descendants, which it had been to Naaman, I do not believe that they would have regretted the being obliged to serve, in

such a peculiar manner, during their earthly course, as walking indications of one of the most brilliant displays of the power and grace of the living God.

Here therefore, my brethren, you have the melancholy event. The abundant instruction conveyed by it lies obviously close at hand; and I might therefore close my discourse without further application. I would do so, did not my heart impel me to return once more to the affecting narrative, and to address to you from it a few well-meant words.

First, then, my friends, I conjure you by the salvation of your souls, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. Be candid and sincere; take heed to the truth both before God and men. Learn to hate moral whitewash and appearance; and if ye are whited sepulchres, O distrust your masks and your artificial disguise! Even as in the case of Gehazi, so for you likewise, the hour of development will come, probably even here below; and undoubtedly on that great day, when everything shall be brought to light that was hidden in darkness. And know, that in the case of many, the hour of unmasking also becomes the hour of ripeness for destruction, and the hour of their complete and final judicial hardness. The moment when Judas perceived that the master saw through him, the exasperation of his black spirit rose to its highest pitch, and Satan took entire possession of him. Believe me, such is also the case with many a hypocrite. Before he is aware, the knavishness of his heart is discovered; and it is not humiliation or abasement which appears as the fruit of this open exposure of his interior, but a Satanic hatred against Christ and his people, which fully gives the unhappy mortal over into the hands of the powers of darkness. May you be preserved

from such a fate by the grace of him, who blesses the upright in heart, but destroys them that speak falsely. May he sanctify you thoroughly and lead you into all truth; divest you first of every mask, which hides from you your own true form, and then the desire to deceive will pass away of itself. In the wretchedness occasioned by the feeling of sin, the approbation of mankind is of no value, whilst that of God is above every thing.

My brethren, I conjure you further, as long as you are not deeply and sacredly in earnest in resigning yourselves without reserve to the Lord, to refrain from a pious phraseology and deportment, in order that through you may not be verified, what has been frequently uttered, that incomparably greater injury has been sustained by the kingdom of God from time immemorial, by means of false brethren, if anything can prove injurious to this kingdom, than from its open enemies and adversaries. From a consideration for us, and from deference towards the Lord's sacred cause, stand back, until you can say with the sincerity of Paul, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ; yea, doubtless and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." Why would you put a constraint upon yourselves, and cause us embarrassment and sorrow by entering into our ranks, the impure reason for which will be too soon recognized, and fresh occasion afforded to the blasphemers of this world to vent their slanders on the God of Israel. Keep to the society of those to whom you belong, according to the germ of your inmost being. Wear the livery of that master, whom you really serve. Do not put on the uniform of Christ, before he himself calls you to his colours. The Christian religion, this noble and

heavenly scion, when grafted into a natural stock, yields only the fruits of corruption in every direction.

Finally, my friends, do not fall a prey to the delusions of Mammon. Whatever prospects he may open to you, do not believe the impotent idol. His golden mountains are but the ocean's foam: his paradises, deceptive phantoms. The only really beautifying good upon earth, is the peace of God. Follow after this with all your energies. It is worthy of the most serious efforts and endeavours. The sacrificing it to a carnal dream, as Gehazi did, is the extreme of madness and infernal deception. 'Though I possessed the whole world, what should I be, but a poor, empty, unhappy creature, if I could not console myself with the love of God. But if I am at liberty to do so, I then care nothing, either for heaven or earth. I am then truly rich.

Yes, all my riches are in thee ;
And out of thee there's nought but pain.
Deep in the heart, my heaven I see ;
'Tis sought for outwardly in vain.

Did not thy love upon me shine,
How quickly would life's joys decay !
But now, since I can call thee mine,
Pleasures attend on all my way.

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